LIGHTING THE WAY: PROMOTING A HEIGHTENED STATE OF SPIRITUAL AWARENESS IN BEREAN MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH THROUGH SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Leary E. Bonnett

B.A., Queens College of the City University of New York, 1973
M.A., Webster University, 1986
M.Div., New York Theological Seminary, 1997

Mentor
Larry Grunden, D.Min., Ph.D.

A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREEOF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
TROTWOOD, OHIO
DECEMBER 2008

United Theological Seminary
Dayton, Ohio

Faculty Approval Page
Doctor of Ministry Final Project

LIGHTING THE WAY: PROMOTING A HEIGHTENED STATE OF SPIRITUAL AWARENESS IN BEREAN MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH THROUGH SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

by

Leary E. Bonnett

United Theological Seminary, 2008

Mentor

Larry Grunden

Date:_____

Approved:

_____
Faculty Mentor

_____
Associate Dean, Doctoral Studies

Copyright © 2008 Leary E. Bonnett
All rights reserved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... vi

PREFACE..... viii

DEDICATION.....x

EPIGRAPH..... xi

INTRODUCTION.....1

Chapter

1. MINISTRY FOCUS 3

2. STATE OF ART IN THIS MINISTRY 31

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS 50

4. METHODOLOGY.....89

5. RESULTS OF MODEL.....105

6. REFLECTIONS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS..... 129

Appendix

A. Model of Project.....147

B. Cycle of Spiritual Experience/Renewal.....149

C. Pre-Test and Post-Test Questionnaire.....160

D. Bible Study and Spirituality.....163

E. Prayer and Spirituality.....172

F. Human Bodies as Instruments of Spirituality.....182

G. Commitment and Spirituality.....189

H. Faith and Spirituality.....198

I. Confidentiality Release.....209

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....211

ABSTRACT

LIGHTING THE WAY: PROMOTING A HEIGHTENED STATE OF SPIRITUAL AWARENESS IN BEREAN MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

by

Leary E. Bonnett

United Theological Seminary, 2008

Mentor

Larry Grunden, D.Min., Ph.D.

The study of empowering leaders through the practice of spiritual disciplines took place at the Berean Missionary Baptist Church, Brooklyn, New York. The study's hypothesis is that leaders will experience a deepening of their relationship with God on account of having participated in the project. An identical pre-test and post-test questionnaire was administered to determine changes in knowledge of spiritual disciplines. Participants listened to lectures and kept journals which indicated whether or not the study enhanced their relationship with God. Results of the test measures indicated that participants experienced change as a result of the project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This humble project was completed with insights gleaned from God's Holy Spirit and the combination of hard work and sacrifice. This however, is not the whole story. While it has undoubtedly been a labor of love on the researcher's part, it has on occasion proven to be a challenge of seemingly herculean dimensions. In summation however, it has been a unique birthing process, which would not have been possible without the support of capable and talented "midwives" to whom I will be eternally indebted.

First and foremost, I am indebted to members of my immediate family from whose presence I separated myself during what might have certainly appeared to them at times to be countless intensive sessions, while I attended classes at United Theological Seminary in the greater Dayton area, Ohio and Peer Sessions with my mentor, Dr. Larry Grunden at his church in Germantown, Ohio and Abbey Gethsemane in Trappist, Kentucky. Their strong support and encouragement was invaluable.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Larry Gunden, a scholar among scholars, pastor among pastors and someone who lives out his mandate as a person of deep faith, Spiritual Coach and mentor of students. In truth, to the researcher he was so much more. Behind the official rubric of his academic office at United Theological Seminary, he possesses the facility to cut through the professional façade to serve as a sage counsel, friend and confidant. Along with his beloved wife Bev, Larry cushioned my excursions into the contours of the unfamiliar Ohio environment on those occasions when my academic pursuits led me into the unfamiliar universe. He took special pains doing whatever was necessary to alleviate my anxieties, in order to ensure that I attained a significant milestone in my life—the acquisition of the Doctor of Ministry degree.

Thirdly, there are those brave warriors at the Berean Missionary Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York, who showed up religiously on Thursday nights during the biting cold of winter to assist in the shaping the D.Min project: Rev. T. Arnold Nance, Rev. Kim Council-Haigler, Minister Trevor Hyde, Jr., Deacon Ellsworth Kwame, and the stellar couple, George and Rose Smith. These individuals became so animated, energized and engrossed in discussions during the six-week session we spent together, that on numerous occasions it proved difficult to break them away from the dialogue and go home. Thank you my beloved friends.

Fourthly, I will be forever indebted to my pastor, Rev. Dr. Arlee Griffin, Jr., who not only opened the door to my seminary training opportunity and ordained ministry, but the one who got me excited about the vast dimensions of Christian literature. The apostle Paul was known to have "sat at the feet" of the great Jewish rabbi and scholar Gamaliel. I sat at the feet of the Rev. Dr. Arlee Griffin, Jr.

Fifthly, I will forever be indebted to Janita Motayne, my friend, confidant and unswerving support pillar, who provided me with the emotional octane needed to complete this project. Her confidence in my ability to showcase the gifts God deposited within my spirit during long stretches when I entertained doubts about my own abilities was the steadying assurance reminding me that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord and those who are called according to His purpose.

Last but certainly not least, I will also be forever indebted to Sherry Augustin for her technical expertise with computers, which served to bring this project to life.

PREFACE

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness on them hath the light shined" (Isaiah 9:2). Isaiah's choice of prophetic words to announce the ministry of Christ continues to reverberate down through the corridors of time and reflects an ancient and enduring conviction that any sphere of activity in which Almighty God acts there is light.

If we would dare be honest with ourselves, we might admit that within the deep recesses of human spirit there is a constant yearning for spiritual light to illuminate life's darkened way, especially when it pertains to the things of God. The vast majority of congregants flock to the Church in search of spiritual illumination, because they intuitively recognize that any terrain devoid of God's presence is one that is shrouded in uncertainty, confusion, fear and despair. As such, they seek succor and support in the Church to which they migrate with the expectation that the incandescence of God's word will somehow illuminate their darkened understanding. Unfortunately, it has been the researcher's observation that the vast majority of the church's membership is bereft of companion and guides who are skilled exegetes of the gospel of Jesus the Christ, capable of unpacking the sacred text and acting as tributaries of God's grace, capable of lighting or pointing others to a deepening of their relationship with our Lord.

In the researcher's humble opinion, the prevailing climate of exegetical darkness within many of our congregations, my own notwithstanding, appears to be the besetting dilemma as to why the vast majority of congregants fail to grow spiritually. In this vein, the corrective would be that of equipping leaders to become skilled exegetes, capable of living up to our Lord's mandate of being "light of the world" (Matthew 5:14), throwing shafts of

spiritual illumination across the pathway of individuals who are ardently seeking the crucial nexus that affords them spiritual ballast and connect them with the their true home of life with God.

"Lighting the Way" is meant to be much more than a catchy slogan. It is a way of life whereby men and women of faith subject themselves to a disciplined lifestyle that culminates in union with God, since this is the ultimate significance of human existence. The disciplined lifestyle is much more than perfunctory rituals. It is an indication of spiritual decisiveness to grow in Christ, whereby the Holy Spirit might usher them into the presence of God's illuminating light, in order that they might be transformed by the glory of His Life.

It is a fact that none of us can teach others what we don't know, nor can we lead others into terrain that we don't know. In order to teach, we must first become intimately acquainted with the subject matter being taught. And in order to take others into what might be to them unfamiliar terrain, we must first become familiar with the contours of the terrain and be able to navigate under the leadership of God's Holy Spirit. In this vein, in order for spiritual guides to light the way to a deepened relationship with God, they must first incarnate the vision of God within their own lives and be supernaturally empowered to lay claim to that vision. When spiritual guides appropriate God's truth in their lives and live out their created destiny, they will be empowered to fulfill our Lord's mandate as "light of the world," thereby illuminating the path to the Divine and leading others to establish union with the Love of their lives and live out their high destiny as sons and daughters of God.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to four individuals whose sage counseling and lifestyle made an indelible impact on my spiritual formation. Three of them have already made their initiation into eternity: The Reverend George O'Jon was my childhood pastor. He played a pivotal role in me coming to know Jesus in a personal way. He was the individual from whose pulpit in the Christian Brethren Church in Linden, Guyana, that I preached my very first sermon at the youthful age of sixteen.

The second individual who is also resting secure in Abraham's bosom is my maternal grandmother, Rachel Alexander. "Mama", as she was affectionately referred to by family members, was a woman of exceptional spiritual nobility and grace. She was the unquestioned patriarch of the Bonnett family. Her succor and support throughout my childhood served as a windbreak against the many absurdities my curious young mind had not yet developed the capacity to adequately grapple with.

The third individual also in heaven and to whom I owe the deepest depth of gratitude is my dearly departed father, Julius Sisnet Bonnet. I frequently refer to him as having been the closest thing to Jesus, the Christ, which I ever knew. Dad was a skilled exegete of the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, more importantly, in the words of Jesus, He was "a light of the world."

The last individual, still alive, to whom I bestow the honor of dedication, is my beloved mother, Kathleen Agatha Elliot, affectionately referred to as "Kathy," by her dearly departed husband. Mother is a praying woman. Prayer is the very systolic of her life and it is by her leadership and example that I learned to access the Presence of the Divine.

EPIGRAPH

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needed not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

2 Tim 2:15

"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God"

Rom 12:2

NOTE: Scripture quotations in this document are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible.

INTRODUCTION

The inability of the postmodern Church to effectively develop, equip and nurture spiritually mature individuals who are skillfully adept at executing the Great Commission of Christ, as outlined in Matthew 29:19-20[1], has negatively impacted the dissemination of the Christian message, not only in American society, but the world at-large.

This project, "Lighting the Way: Promoting a heightened State of Spiritual Awareness in Berean Missionary Baptist Church," is designed with the intent of equipping individuals with a portal whereby they might avail themselves to God as "living sacrifices" through practice of spiritual disciplines, in order that He might infuse them with *Zoe*—real life and transform them at the core of their personalities.

Chapter One defines the area of ministry the project seeks to address and provides the spiritual autobiography of the researcher. It also addresses the context of the writer's ministry and the project synergy in an effort to execute the project.

Chapter Two catalogues significant literary works that have contributed to shaping the project. Works by authors such as Diogenes Allen, Larry Grunden, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, C.S. Lewis and Howard Thurman, to name a few, have made invaluable contributions in strengthening the researcher's argument that spiritual disciplines can be effectively employed as a roadmap, enabling Christians to cultivate a deepening of their relationship with God. While it is true that there are no established formulas for Christian perfection and it is virtually impossible for us to systematize God

[1] Matthew 19:19-29. (NRSV)

by attempting to put Him in a box and expect that when we apply certain formulas we will capture the full essence of His being, the intent of this model is merely that of serving as a pathway that culminates in the deepest possible life with the Divine. Chapter Four describes the methodology, data collection and analysis of the design employed by the researcher at Berean. It also incorporates the intervention model, instrumentation and the participants utilized in the model.

Chapter Five provides readers with the final results of discoveries and discusses implementation of the project, while in Chapter Six, the researcher provides reflection, discussion, summaries, conclusions and recommendations for current and future projects.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

This exciting stage of my Christian pilgrimage finds me insinuated by divine edict in the context of the Berean Missionary Baptist Church, a vibrant African-American faith community located in the Crown Heights Section of the borough of Brooklyn, New York.

Berean is a church with a storied history whose motto reads: "Remembering our Past and redeeming our Future." Historical records bear witness to the fact that the church was founded in 1850 and has its genesis in the nineteenth century African-American communities of Weeksville and Carville, both of which were in close proximity to the church's current location. Berean holds the unique distinction of being the first African-American congregation within the Empire State to construct a church edifice from the ground up. Legend has it that the church's history is colored by a revolutionary past, having served at one time as a way station on the Underground Railroad, an elaborate system of safe houses that was instrumental in assisting runaway slaves from Southern slave states to break free from the crippling indignities of the peculiar institution of chattel slavery that consigned them to bondage and make their way to freedom in the Northern United States, even as far as Canada.[1]

To better understand the anatomy of the researcher's affiliation with my faith community and my objective of attempting to foster a heightened state of spiritual awareness in the urban congregation that would ultimately lead others to a deepening of their

[1] Tracy Cooper and Carol F. Dixon, *Berean Missionary Baptist Church: Remembering Our Past, Redeeming Our Future* (Port Washington, NY: Commemorative Publications, 2001), 13.

relationship with God, it might be helpful to reflect on salient aspects embroidering the long arch of my spiritual trajectory that, will hopefully illuminate how formative and transformative forces impacting my spiritual formation conspired in shaping my present hermeneutic.

I am a product of what is sociologically referred to as the "third world." My earthly pilgrimage has its genesis in the bauxite mining town of Linden, Guyana, a small rural Caribbean community of approximately fifty thousand souls, nestled on the eastern bank of the Demerara River, sixty-five miles upriver from the nation's capital city, Georgetown. I am the third of seven siblings born to Julius and Kathleen Bonnett. Ours was a nuclear family in which both parents were professing Christians, who ensured to the best of their ability that life around the family circle was congruent with the teachings of the Church as they understood it.

My eighty-eight year old mother, Kathleen, is a woman of deep and genuine faith. Preceding the event of my birth, she was actively involved in several ministries of the Christian Brethren Church, the institution through which I received my religious indoctrination. Mother was my first Sunday School teacher. As far back as I could remember, the practice of prayer has always been the systolic and diastolic rhythm of her daily existence. I vividly recall from early childhood memories that each morning at the early hour of six o clock, she roused all of the siblings from their warm and comfortable beds to begin the day reading God's word and praying. Whenever she or any family member was confronted by a disturbing dilemma, her automatic response to the crisis situation was, "Let's pray about it." I learned from my beloved mother that the Christian life is prayer right through. And that it could be nothing else, really. By precept and example, mother taught

each of her offspring the biblical edict of being prayerful at all times (1 Thessalonians 5:17).[2] Due in large part to my mother's influence, praying became part of the rhythm of our days. The tradition of starting each day with Bible reading and prayer continues to be a daily ritual in the researcher's household.

While I recognize prayer as the defining characteristic of my mother's life, I discerned that my late father, Julius, was a learned exegete whose worldview was firmly rooted in Scripture. My dad was a blue collar worker, employed at the local bauxite company in the capacity of a diesel mechanic for a duration of more than thirty years. At the height of the Second World War when Guyana was still a British colony, he had the distinct privilege of serving as a native chaplain to British forces deployed to the eighty-three thousand square mile colonial outpost located on the northern tip of South America. My dad enthusiastically unpacked Scripture for his inquiring son, by making himself available in those instances when I sought exegetical enlightening on some unclear Bible passage. In truth, my late father was actually the individual who provided me with my first theological lesson. He stretched my inquisitive mind and developed within me a new-found appreciation for Scripture.

Shortly after being baptized, I was engaged in a searching conversation with another Christian brother in the family living room. If my mind serves me correctly, the topic with which we wrestled with on that memorable occasion centered on the biblical understanding of grace. My dad walked into the living room and after overhearing the discussion, blurted out that grace was God's unmerited favor to humankind. He proceeded to further expound that grace was a gift from the Creator that no one really deserves, cannot earn, but that it is unilaterally dispensed by a loving God anyway.

---

[2] 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

Before my parents were united in holy matrimony, my father was affiliated with the Pilgrim Holiness Church. He unfortunately separated himself from fellowship with the organization when British racial practices of the colonial era reared their ugly head within his local faith community. While he never personally disclosed to any of his children the circumstances surrounding the threshold event that prompted him to break ranks with his former church home to remain unaffiliated with another faith community for quite an extensive period of time, my mother, unknown to my dad, informed me of the causative factor.

Mother stated that during my father's affiliation with his former faith community, it was under the stewardship of a native-born pastor. She disclosed that the living quarters provided the pastor and his family by the church hierarchy were deemed unfit for human habitation by the local congregation. Despite the fact that officers of the local church petitioned the governing body, which was exclusively white, to provide appropriate accommodations to the native-born pastor and his family, the petitions were repeatedly rebuffed. After enduring as much hardship and humiliation that he possibly could, the native-born pastor regrettably resigned his position as leader of the flock. The governing body subsequently replaced him with a white minister, but not before refurbishing the living quarters for the incoming minister and his family. The insensitive treatment leveled against the native congregation proved too much for my late father to take, thereby prompting him to sever his affiliation with the Pilgrim Holiness Church.

My dad recognized that the praxis of the leadership of his former faith community was inconsistent with the principles of the Kingdom they proclaimed and that the Body of Christ was betrayed by their actions. He recognized that, while communion existed between

the white leadership and the native population, there was little or no fellowship. As it pertained to the vertical aspect of the Cross where native Guyanese and whites were reconciled to God through Christ, only this axis was a reality within the faith community. The horizontal reality was missing because the walls that divided the congregation along racial lines had never been crushed to demonstrate that regardless of race all were one blood-related family in Christ.

From the earliest of my days in colonial Guyana, I recognized that I lived in a universe in which every facet of my existence was circumscribed by a race-based colonial ideology of haphazard segregation, consolidated into a monolithic system that was diabolic in detail and overwhelming in its power. It was a system whose policies were overtly sanctioned by the governing bodies of the mainline churches whose leadership were exclusively Europeans.

My family was consigned to live in a segregated part of town established for native-born Guyanese—one not far removed from the notoriously inhumane pre-independence apartheid system of South Africa. Natives and whites existed in two different spheres of reality. We did not live in the same neighborhoods. We did not attend the same schools. We did not eat or socialize together. The local hospital was segregated with white and black wings. We shared nothing in common, with the possible exception of being under the same roof in church on Sundays. Natives were only permitted to enter the white community on a limited basis during daylight hours and at no time after the hours of darkness. The freedom of our movements was carefully circumscribed; a fact so accepted that is was taken as the norm. The world of native Guyanese and whites were separated by an unspoken wall of hostility and overt suspicion. This reality wreaked havoc on my self esteem and in many ways,

influenced me to feel less than fully human. To put it in a nutshell, the cultural assaults imposed on natives by the white colonial regime made me feel as though I had a hole in my soul. As someone created in the image of God I felt inadequate and incomplete. I came to realize in later years that my drive to excel and be number one, or twice as good as my white counterparts, was due in large part for my need to feel that I was worthy and fully human.

My dad stood a few inches over five feet. He was a man of little stature and few words. He understood the dehumanizing aspects of colonial life and calculatingly cultivated a quiet equilibrium that enabled him to remain calm in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. To my anxious and fragile spirit he was an emblem of indomitability that refused to acquiesce to the second class status mind-set proscribed by the gatekeepers of the colonial regime. As much as he possibly could, he instilled in each of his children the biblical truth we were created in the image of God. More importantly, he reminded us that we were as good as anybody else and that we were beloved by our Creator. His forceful presence in the lives of his children was a steadying assurance in the distorted cosmology of British colonial policies. My dad instilled pride, dignity and confidence in his children about being black in a society that belittled black worth.

Even though my dad had no formal church affiliation from my childhood until a short time after I emigrated to the United States of America at age seventeen, he remained a very devout Christian who ensured that his children received religious instruction at the Christian Brethren Church where my mother was a member. He understood that religion and a relationship with Almighty God makes a difference in the quality of human lives. As such, he ensured that his family attended a Bible-believing church that provided the spiritual ballast essential for life's journey.

A sad episode in my family's history was the fact that my mother was expelled from fellowship with the Christian Brethren Church after a period of more than two decades of membership, because my young teenage sister became pregnant out of wedlock. The pastor felt that it was my mother's responsibility to ensure that her daughter remained a virgin until such time that she was married. I later discovered from the church's current pastor that the real reason that my mother was expelled from fellowship by the then pastor, was the fact that she allegedly did not inform him about her daughter's pregnancy when she first became aware of it. My friend disclosed that both parents confided to him that in a society where premarital pregnancy is socially unacceptable, they were embarrassed over the matter and agonized over it for a long time before disclosing it to their pastor.

After my mother was expelled from fellowship with the Christian Brethren Church, she subsequently became affiliated with the local United Methodist Church. It might have appeared that the insensitive treatment meted out to my mother by her former pastor would have been the final nail in the proverbial coffin that would drive my father permanently away from the landscape of organized religion. Instead, God used the occasion to influence him to join his soul mate at her new faith community, where they both remained in fellowship until they emigrated from Guyana to join their son in the United States of America during his tenure as a Commissioned Officer in the United States Army.

Despite what might be deemed insensitive and unbiblical treatment on the part of the former pastor of the Christian Brethren Church as it pertained to excommunicating parents from fellowship when their unmarried daughters became impregnated, along with my home environment, the church was one of the twin components of the incubator that engendered my spiritual formation. In truth, both were complimentary milieus through which I became

immersed in the doctrinal tenets of the Christian faith. From as far back as I could remember, church and family were the pillars of my spiritual formation.

Church attendance every Sunday was mandatory. No sibling was permitted to arbitrarily absent themselves from worship services unless they were afflicted with a debilitating illness of some sort. Not only was church attendance mandatory, the home environment additionally reflected that Sunday is sacred to the mystery of the Resurrection. As such, all secular activities were suspended for the day and none of the siblings was permitted to engage in outdoor recreational activities after returning from religious services, as we customarily did on regular weekdays.

We never owned a television set since this luxury was not commercially available in the country before 1970. We did however own a radio receiving set, which was turned off on Sundays in observance of the Sabbath. The same stipulation would have applied to a television set had we owned what in my home would have been a luxury item.

I accepted Jesus into my life at the tender age fifteen and was baptized in the refreshing waters of the Demerara River by the church's pastor, the Reverend George O'Jon. The event was a public, but solemn affair that transpired in the safe sanctuary of the water's edge, a mere thirty or so yards from the main entrance of the tiny white-washed wooden structure of the Christian Brethren Church standing on the opposite side of the dusty dirt roadway. Attended by a phalanx of serene looking white-regaled church members who had assembled on the sandy riverbank and curious onlookers who gazed inquisitively from a short distance away, the ancient and beautiful ritual unfolded on a balmy Sunday morning when the sky was dazzling and the tropical climate was in its full splendor. Lacing the bright, tropical sunshine was a cool gentle breeze that sent leaves snapping overhead in trees nearby,

as if they collectively applauded the grace-filled ordinance. The tropical sunlight shimmering on the glassy surface of the mighty river created a golden basilica of fire and water. Subjecting myself to the ordinance of baptism by immersion, was a public declaration of my being buried to sin and rising to walk by faith in a new life, afforded me by my risen Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ (Romans 6:4).[3] I sensed in my spirit that unforgettable morning the heavens opening and the Holy Spirit descending on me like a dove. It was undoubtedly an epiphany experience.

Despite his penchant for unorthodox behavior and hermeneutic inflexibility, the Reverend George O'Jon was a fortress of faith and played a pivotal role in both my conversion experience and early spiritual formation. To my young mind, he appeared as one of the characters who stepped out of Joseph Conrad's book, *The Heart of Darkness.* He was a man of small stature, standing barely a few inches over five feet. With the exception of Sundays when he donned a business suit for religious services, he was perpetually attired in a khaki-colored bush hat, khaki-colored bush jacket, khaki-colored short trousers and knee-high khaki-colored stockings. His countenance bore a perpetual expression of radiance and peace. The first thing to greet someone when they came into his presence was the explosion of white teeth ensuing from the grin framing his face.

The Reverend George O'Jon assumed the pastorate of the Christian Brethren Church when I was about six or seven years of age. He was a native Guyanese who spent several years as a missionary in Zambia, Southern Africa. He returned to Guyana to assume the leadership of the Christian Brethren Church in Linden after the former pastor, a white minister, returned to his native Scotland. Affectionately referred to as "Uncle George" by his beloved parishioners, the Reverend O'Jon demonstrated a tireless work ethic concerning his

[3] Romans 6:4.

ministerial duties. He instituted several new ministries within the congregation, to include a vibrant comprehensive Christian education program designed to deepen the membership's relationship with God. His zeal for outreach ministry was his consuming passion, prompting him to acquire a wooden boat approximately thirty or so feet in length, which he then outfitted with a powerful Archimedes © outboard engine. Several times during the course of the year, he transported as many members of his flock that the boat could accommodate, to remote hamlets along the banks of the Demerara River, far from the major commercial centers, where he conducted religious services. During his tenure as pastor, he was instrumental for the erecting of new church edifices at several of these far-flung locations.

Being an adventurous teen, I relished the opportunity to spend weekends at remote hamlets, which were nothing more than tracts of land where pioneering-minded folk cleared the forest to establish tiny communities. Residents of the communities lived off the land by raising crops and livestock and fishing in the tea-colored silver ribbon of a river that snaked lazily through the lush tropical South American jungle. Homes of the peasants were nothing more than tiny wooden shacks outfitted with neither electricity nor indoor plumbing. In the vast majority of hamlets there were no established municipalities that provided medical, educational or any of the routine services available in most modern-day communities. To receive an education, children from small river communities were compelled to travel on a daily basis by boat to larger districts where schools were provided by the central government in Georgetown. As is the case to this day, it was not uncommon to encounter children as young as five years old paddling themselves to school in dug-out canoes which were constructed from felled trees. To obtain medical attention which was only sough in emergencies when life or limb was threatened residents of river communities travelled by

boat to the urban centers of Georgetown or Linden, whichever was closest to their community.

In economic terms, residents of river districts were poor. However, they were rich in pride and for some unknown reason developed the capacity to remain uncontaminated by the crass commercialism and virulent political differentials prevalent in the commercialized urban centers. In more ways than one, their simple way of life might have conjured up fond memories in the mind of my pastor of his not-so-distant sojourn in Southern Africa. This might very well have been one of the main reasons why he relentlessly threw himself into service ministering to "the least of God's children," prompting them to reciprocate by showering him with unlimited love and affection.

I do not recall the exact point in time when the Reverend O' Jon began taking a personal interest in my spiritual well-being, but at sometime during my early teenage years he began to encourage me to surrender my life to Christ. He obviously saw it as his pastoral obligation in leading me to a personal relationship with Christ. I would however like to believe that from those early days he discerned the anointing of God on my young life. However, whenever the opportunity presented itself, he seized the moment to engage me in one-to-one conversations about my soul's salvation. Even though I became intimately aware of the truth of the gospel at a young age, I rebelled against my pastor's admonitions and kicked against the pricks, employing the parlance of the apostle Paul. In my misguided imagination, I felt that I first needed to party hearty as the vast majority of my hedonistic peers were doing at the time, in order to satisfy the lust of the flesh and expunge all of the worldly cravings from my system. I thought that after engaging in as much bacchanalian reveling that my young life could endure, I would then turn to Christ. I generally enjoyed

attending church and assumed that someday I would become a Christian—if for no other reason than to avoid the scorching fires of hell. But it was not something that I planned to do until I was well advanced in age. Unknown to me at that time, God had specific designs on my young life.

Sometime around my fourteenth year or thereabouts, my pastor became afflicted with a debilitating malady, necessitating that he be hospitalized for an extensive period of time in the capital city of Georgetown, which had superior medical facilities than the rural community of Linden. After an extensive period of hospitalization he was discharged, but remained a little while longer with relatives in the capital city, in order to fully convalesce from his sickness. In like manner as the young prophet Elisha became distraught over the departure of his mentor, Elijah, I likewise became convulsed in my spirit over my spiritual mentor's medical predicament. My unsettling did not ensue from the fact that he might embark on his initiation into eternity and leave me behind. It revolved around the fact that, I was cognizant that while he repeatedly seeded God's truth into my spirit, I remained stubborn and stiff-necked, refusing to afford God the opportunity to reclaim the life that is rightfully His and provide me with *Zoe*—true life or the God-life.

I recognized for the first time in my life that my refusal to embrace the life-transforming truth of the gospel rendered me spiritually barren like an arid desert. As such, restlessness raged through the aisles of my spirit like a torrential gale, paralleling the prophetic utterance of Augustine, the sage North African bishop of Hippo: "Thou hast made us for thyself O God, and our hearts are restless until they come to rest in thee." I do not recall how or when I was jolted out of my seductive spiritual sleep, but unexpectedly one day, I became arrested by a vast and awe-inspiring tranquility that irradiated my young life,

prompting me to swing wide the door of my being to the invasive rush of the Holy Spirit. The epiphany was inescapable. I knew at that point in time that I was born again.

Motivated by further promptings from the Spirit, I implored my mother to provide me with my convalescing pastor's address in the capital city. After receiving the requested information, I eagerly penned an urgent letter to him, disclosing that I had accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior. Shortly thereafter, I received a happy response from the recovering patient, informing me of how elated he was over the fact that God had answered his many prayers pertaining to my soul's salvation.

After convalescing sufficiently to the point where he was fit enough to resume his duties, the Reverend O'Jon returned to his pastorate at Linden. After receiving the requisite course of instruction provided by the church to new converts, I was baptized shortly thereafter in the Demerara River by the pastor. It was customary that before submerging baptismal candidates below the surface of the warm waters of the tropical river, the Reverend O'Jon would provide each individual with a text that he had personally culled from the Bible for them. The text provided to me on that balmy Sunday morning before I was subjected to the ancient ritual was gleaned from Paul's second epistle to Timothy: "Study to show thyself approved to God, a workman who need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy: 2:15).[4] I had no inkling at that point in time the prophetic implications for my life that were encapsulated in the selected biblical text. However, over the ensuing years I cultivated an insatiable appetite for both the reading and study of biblical literature, indicating that on the day of my baptism the text hinted at characteristics in my life that were yet to unfold.

---

[4] 2 Timothy 2:15.

Shortly after my baptism, the Reverend O'Jon afforded me the opportunity to preach my very first sermon at the church's evening gospel service. This was undoubtedly a *kairos* moment in my young life. Nattily attired in a dark English-styled suit, white shirt and tie and spit-shined shoes, I expounded the gospel message as the Holy Spirit gave me utterance. At the conclusion of the homily, my pastor was visibly ecstatic over the stellar performance of his young protégé. As he moved forward from his seat on the first pew in the sanctuary to congratulate me during my descent from the pulpit, his smiling visage revealed the customary explosion of white teeth and his words were: "I knew that you could do it." His confidence in my emerging oratorical abilities was a much needed infusion of emotional octane to my developing psyche.

In addition to being compelled to grapple with the absurdities beating into my young life by the practices of the hostile colonial environment in which I was insinuated, my pastor assisted me in navigating a long and dark tunnel of tribulation that literally rocked my world: the untimely death of my beloved younger brother, Leslie.

Leslie was accidentally killed by a drunken European driver, who was employed in a management capacity at the local bauxite company whose headquarters was in Arvida, Canada. As expected by the overwhelming majority of native citizens that were quite familiar with the injustice dispensed by the oppressive colonial court system, the white manager was acquitted of any wrongdoing; despite overwhelming evidence that he was actually driving intoxicated when he accidentally killed my younger brother. Shortly after the conclusion of the sham of a trial, he was summarily dispatched back to safe sanctuary in Canada by his protective employers.

I was keenly aware of the fact that justice was denied my traumatized family members, leaving me with the feeling that I had plenty cause to visualize the world as both hostile and unfair. To be frank, I envisioned the word as a menacing and unfriendly place. Convulsed by perpetual anger, I unwittingly afforded hate the opportunity to set up camp in my soul. As such, I developed a deep resentment towards the gatekeepers of the British colonial regime whose malevolent power differential controlled the trappings of power in my native land. However, being insightful and attentive to my emotional lacerations, my pastor took great pains to admonish me that, hate is not congruent with the Spirit of Christ and that it would ultimately destroy my peace if I allowed it to lay claim to my spirit. Although I have never been able to successfully expunge the horrific incident of my brother's death from the precincts of my memory, by means of much prayer and God's enabling grace, I found the requisite strength to break free from the stranglehold the destructive emotion had on me.

Even though my young life was at times defined in less than human terms by the dehumanizing policies of the British colonial regime, the spiritual kernels of self worth implanted in my psyche by both my parents and pastor began to germinate. My emerging spiritual maturity ushered me to the awareness that in God's economy I was truly special and that my Creator had specific designs for my life. Buoyed by this understanding, I was led by the Spirit to seek my Creator's face, in order to discover His purpose for my life. In pursuit of His revelation, I embarked on repeated excursions deep into the bowels of the lush jungle in close proximity to my home, where I spent countless hours in solitude reading God's word and praying. It appeared at times that I found more companionship in the woods that with my peers. The woods and animals befriended me and provided my inquiring spirit with a sense of belonging that was not contingent on seeking human relationships. Even though I could

not skillfully articulate it at that early point in time, I somehow knew that God wanted to get me alone, in order that through solitude and contemplation I might learn to recognize His Presence, which was indispensible to my spiritual formation. Thomas Merton explains it this way:

> The fact remains that contemplation will not be given to those who willfully remain at a distance from God, who confine their interior life to a few routine exercises of piety and a few external acts of worship and service performed as a matter of duty. Such people are careful to avoid sin. They respect God as master. But their hearts do not belong to him. They are not really interested in him, except in order to insure themselves against losing heaven and going to hell. In actual practice, their minds and hearts are taken up with their own ambitions and troubles and comforts and pleasures and all their worldly interest and anxieties and fears. God is only invited to enter this charmed circle to smooth out difficulties and dispense rewards.[5]

Merton declared at yet another point that, "God gives Himself to those who give themselves to Him."[6]

Soren Kierkegard , the Swedish theologian and writer, is credited with having said that life is lived going forward, but looking backwards. As such, I did not understand in my youthful years the tremendous impact my frequent forays into the woods, spending extensive periods of time wrapped in the echo of the sound of nature in the pursuit of *Jehovah Shamah*—the Presence of God would serve to shape my spiritual evolution. However, as I look back down the corridors of time to discover turning points that were instrumental in guiding me towards my personal destiny, I recognize that God saw the necessity of isolating me from environmental distractions

---

[5] Thomas Merton, *What Is Contemplation?* (Springfield, IL: Templegate, 1950), 12-13.

[6] Thomas Merton, *A Year With Thomas Merton* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 69.

that competed with Him for my attention and have me alone, in order that He might shower me with His shekinah and shape my character. Through His omniscience, He recognized that it was necessary that I cultivate a contemplative spirit through a deliberate and sustained effort, before I would be able to detect His will and by so doing bring my entire being into harmony with that will.

As I reflect on the lives of people with battered identities in the urban American ghetto that God has afforded me the sacred privilege of ministering, I recognize that throughout the decades now rolled up like a scroll in eternity, He had been preparing me for this exciting stage of Christian stewardship. Assailed by the twin demons of racism and depersonalization, the vast majority of these urban dwellers find themselves confronted by what Cornell West describes in his book entitled, *Race matters,* as "the nilhistic threat." Professor West argues that, the nilhistic threat is not simply a matter of relative economic deprivation and political powerlessness—though economic deprivation well-being and political clout are prerequisites for meaningful black progress. He opines that, it is primarily a question of speaking to the profound sense of psychological depression, personal worthlessness, and social despair so widespread in black America.[7]

I emigrated from Guyana at age seventeen to the United States of America with the expressed purpose of attaining university education. My sojourn into the Western Hemisphere was a benchmark event in my life. From as far back as I could remember it had been my lifelong dream to eventually pursue university education in the United States of America (USA) and God graciously granted me the desire of my heart. After arriving in the USA, I enrolled in Allen School for Physician Aides,

[7] Cornell West, *Race matters* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), 12.

located in Jamaica, New York, where I completed a one year certificate course in Medical Laboratory Technology. After graduating from Allen, I subsequently enrolled in Queens College of The City University of New York, located in Flushing, New York, where I completed a baccalaureate degree in economics.

I had every intention of entering seminary after completing my baccalaureate studies, but my life suddenly embarked on a strange and convoluted odyssey. I enrolled in college during the waning years of the Vietnam War and since America was still hard-pressed to recruit every available able-bodied fighting man in the execution of its misguided military campaign in the steamy jungles of South East Asia, I was unexpectedly drafted into military service. Due to the fact that I was a full-time student when I received my draft notice from "Uncle Sam," I was afforded the opportunity to complete my degree before entering active military service.

After graduating college, I was inducted into the United States Army and after being subjected to the induction physical exam, I was dispatched to Basic Combat Training (BCT). After completing BCT, I received Advanced Individual Training (AIT) as a Combat Medic. After completing AIT, I was posted overseas. Upon my return to the United States, I decided that I wanted to become a Commissioned Officer and fly army helicopters. I applied to and was accepted to Officers' Candidate School (OCS) and graduated as a Second Lieutenant. I subsequently attended rotary wing flight training. After attending numerous other military programs that culminated in thirteen years of active military service with me in a state of utter frustration, I separated from the United States Army having attained the field grade rank of Major.

After enlisting in the military, I placed my early desire of attending seminary on the back burner of my life. In truth, I relegated it to my mental garbage can. However, looking back in retrospect, I am able to recognize instances where God made overtures to remind me of His calling on my life, even though I was not predisposed to listen to Him at the time.

I spent the lion's share of my military career on military bases in the American South. During my postings to these bases, I frequently took time to worship at churches in the surrounding communities. On more than one occasion when I entered certain churches for the first time, the pastor sent one of his officers to enquire whether I was a minister. When I informed my mother of the strange happenings, she reminded me of my initial desire of pursuing seminary training and pointed out that like the Old Testament prophet Jonah, I could not run from God's ordering of my life.

After my eleventh year in service, I received military orders posting me overseas to assume command of a medical company organic to US Army combat division. It turned out to be a demanding assignment that I did not request or relish. In retrospect it turned out to be the turning point in my life.

After settling in my new assignment, I became acquainted with several Christians on the overseas base, including members of the entire Chaplain Corps. There was a shortage of military Chaplains in the Division at the time. As such, when my spiritual gifts became evident to members of the Corps, I was afforded frequent opportunities to bring the gospel message at the base chapel on Sundays and also in instances when the Division was engaged in maneuvers away from home base. After

several promptings by the Chaplain in charge of the Gospel Service, I wrote to the pastor of the last church with which I was affiliated in the United States, requesting that he license me in the Gospel Ministry. The pastor was happy to accommodate my request and within a very short period, I received my Gospel License in the mail. Even though I was not an official Army Chaplain, I functioned in such an unofficial capacity on numerous occasions, in addition to performing my primary duty as a Medical Company Commander.

As the end of my tour of duty overseas ended, it became evident by the confluence of military and personal forces influencing my life that, I was destined to separate from the armed services. One of the major forces influencing this reality was my disintegrating martial situation. I met and married a former service member and together we brought three beautiful children into the world. My wife did not travel with me when I was posted overseas and I later wrote to her from my overseas location, informing her that I had become a licensed minister of the gospel. I heard through the grapevine that she remarked to a mutual friend of ours that when she married me she did not intend to marry a minister. Her attitude towards my ministerial status placed a strain on our martial relationship and it soon began to disintegrate. Shortly after my return to the United States, my wife disappeared with our three children, but not before first helping herself to half the savings of our joint bank account. It was close to seven years before I would again see my children, whose ages at the time ranged from seven years to two months at the time of their disappearance. It is understood that it was yet another traumatizing event that rocked my universe.

I separated from active military duty bitter at the military, bitter at my departed spouse, bitter at the world and most of all bitter at God. Why did He orchestrate or allow events that compelled me give up what I considered to be a secure and promising military career? More pointedly, why did he permit my wife to disappear into thin air with our three children? These persistent and puzzling questions haunted the hallways of my mind.

Unable to adequately grapple with the emotional maelstrom in which I found myself, I indulged in an extensive pity party and failed to recognize that God was orchestrating His divine purpose for my life. However, on account of my spiritual myopia, I was unable to see the new realities that were unfolding before my eyes.

I lived in close proximity to my present church home during college and became well acquainted with its reputation for good music and sound biblical preaching. Upon my return to the neighborhood after separating from active military service, I decided to attend Sunday services at the familiar landmark.

After taking careful note of my frequent presence in service on Sundays, the Chairman of the Male Usher Board invited me to become an usher. I accepted his gracious invitation and became an active member of the Usher Board. After a few short weeks, it became known that I had no formal affiliation with the church. I was promptly advised that I needed to become a full-fledged member if I wanted to continue in the capacity as an usher. I recognized that I still entertained quite a bit of residual anger from my pain-drenched experiences and continued to blame God for allowing events to happen. I foolishly thought that I was evening scores with Him and concluded that I had no desire of becoming formally affiliated with another religious

organization anytime soon. As such, I politely informed the Chairman of my decision to remain unaffiliated with the church and returned to sitting in the pews on subsequent Sundays.

The Chairman was a persistent individual who refused to allow me to remain domiciled in the pews. At the end of Sunday services when the invitation was made for new members, he positioned himself at the end of the pew where I sat and employed head and hand gestures, encouraging me to join the church. He even volunteered to walk to the front of the church with me when I responded to the invitation for membership. After enduring this unsettling and attention-getting ritual for several Sundays, I finally relented of my obstinacy, joined the church and resumed my ushering duties.

One evening after the conclusion of a Usher Board meeting, the Chairman provided me with a ride home in his automobile. During the journey home, we swapped stories of our military experiences. He disclosed that he was a helicopter door gunner in Vietnam, having served in the very same Division in which I served subsequent to him, for a period of five years as a Commissioned Officer. This was quite an astonishing revelation. Experiencing a kinship not uncommon to brothers-in-arms, I confided to him that I was a licensed minister.

I never though much of the conversation I had with the Chairman during our ride home on the evening subsequent to the Usher Board meeting. Shortly thereafter however, I was summoned to an audience with the senior pastor. He informed me that it was revealed to him that I was a minister and he invited me to become a member of his ministerial staff. I responded to the invitation by informing him that I needed time

to consider the offer. In truth, I really never gave much thought to the offer after our meeting.

Several months elapsed during which I repeatedly refused subsequent requests by the senior pastor to consider becoming a member of his ministerial staff. In like manner, as the Chairman of the Usher Board, his persistence eventually wore me down. I relented and became a member of the church's ministerial staff.

Even though God continued to orchestrate the trajectory of my life in a certain direction, I was still preoccupied with my emotional lacerations, to the point that I was never cognizant of the direction in which my life was suddenly heading and the divine orchestrations continued without any conscious recognition on my part.

A few months after becoming a member of the ministerial staff, I was afforded the opportunity to preside at a Sunday service at which the Rev. Dr. T. William Howard, former President of New York Theological Seminary was the guest preacher. Dr. Howard had recently returned from Libya, along with the Reverend Jessie Jackson, founder of Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) and the Honorable Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam. The three stellar personalities were still basking in the glow for having successfully negotiated the release of an American naval aviator, whose plane had recently been shot down by Libyan anti aircraft fire, while on a reconnaissance mission over Libyan airspace. The aviator successfully ejected from his aircraft and parachuted safely to the ground, but was unfortunately captured by Libyan forces and subsequently held as a prisoner of war.

I had no inkling as to the personality of Dr. Howard until the moment that he was introduced to the audience by the senior pastor. During our brief time together on the pulpit, he questioned me about myself and wanted to know what my future endeavors were, now that I had separated from the military. At the conclusion of the service, we engaged in some additional conversation before saying goodbye to each other. I thought nothing more of our encounter.

A few days after the service at which Dr. Howard spoke, I unexpectedly received an application in the mail from New York Theological Seminary. The enclosed letter drafted by Dr. Howard's Secretary, informed me that her boss gave her explicit instructions to send me an application packet for the upcoming semester. Recognizing that I had not yet expunged from my spirit the vestiges of bitterness concerning my recent misfortunes, I found it difficult to bring myself in submission to God's will, to the point of attending seminary. As such, I simply placed the application packet on a shelf and thought nothing more about it. As the application deadline rapidly approached, thoughts about it resurfaced in my mind and I found myself unable to sleep. I allowed myself to be deluded by the mistaken impression that if I completed the document without submitting transcripts from previous academic institutions I had attended, I would be rejected. After pursuing this course of action, I was surprisingly summoned to the seminary for an interview with one of the professors of the institution.

Still captivated by my fog of self-deception, I imagined that the interview would simply be a formality afforded every applicant, after which I would be notified that, in lieu of the fact that I did not submit official transcripts from previous

academic institutions I had attended, my application was denied. At the conclusion of the interview the professor inquired whether or not I was ready to attend seminary. Harboring the foolish belief that the interview was nothing more than a charade, I replied that I was indeed ready to enroll for the upcoming semester.

I left the interview expecting that on any given day I would receive a letter of denial from the institution. A letter from the institution did finally arrive. However, instead of denying my application, I was accepted to begin classes in the upcoming semester. Surprisingly, I was afforded one full year to have official transcripts from previous academic institutions sent to the seminary. I recognized at that point n time that the hand of God was moving in my life.

I began my course of studies at NYTS in the fall semester and three years later I graduated with a Masters of Divinity degree. My crowning achievement was not only the fact that that I graduated from seminary with expanded theological boundaries enabling me to engage in reflection that went far beyond the confines of convention and dogma, I was also the recipient of the President's Award. The award is presented to individuals who during their course of academic study at the institution persevere and graduate even though they were confronted by seemingly insurmountable odds. In my case, it was the death of Shani, a daughter born to my new bride and me.

Shani was of premature birth and existed on the earthly plane for one solitary day before making her initiation into eternity. My bride's pain-drenched pregnancy, Shani's subsequent death and seemingly insurmountable medical and other bills, influenced me to abandon my course of studies in seminary. However, God shone

through the dark hours and made a way out of what appeared as no way, in order that I might complete all required course work and graduate, even when I envisioned no exit out of my dark tunnel of despair.

Paralleling the life story of the prophet Jonah who forsook his divine assignment, but was later brought full circle to do what God requested him to do, I was also brought full circle to complete seminary training as had been my intention when I emigrated from my native Guyana decades earlier. Despite the long hiatus in the culmination of a deferred goal, God saw the necessity of equipping me with the requisite skills that I might take my divine right place in His vineyard as a light of the world and salt of the earth.

I am of the firm belief that God deposited me in an environment not unlike that of the Old Testament's prophet Ezekiel's valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37).[8] I recognize that I am no temporary day-tripper to the harsh contours of alienation and social dislocation, but someone born and bred in a dehumanizing colonial regime and indigenized in a family structure that is intimately familiar with the sweltering heat of racial oppression. Armed with this mind set, my mission in my contextual valley is that of throwing shafts of light across the pathway of struggling folk whose profession of faith is continuously being forged under conditions that raise legitimate questions about God's presence in their midst. In support of struggling souls, who in the words of Howard Thurman, "find themselves with their backs against the wall," I, like the late African-American prophet, am compelled to raise the most quoted phrase

[8] Ezekiel 37.

from his book entitled, *Jesus and the Disinherited:* "What then, is the word of the religion of Jesus to those who stand with their backs against the wall."[9]

As a minister of the gospel of Jesus, the Christ, I am keenly aware of the fact that Jesus was a Jew and a member of an oppressed group that suffered from Roman domination in first century Palestine. Yet again, like Thurman, I support the premise that only those who stand with their backs against the wall can offer inspiration and hope to the disinherited and that, Jesus is intimately acquainted with the reality of the "wall."[10]

Since I have a lived, rather than a vicarious experience that parallels the life story of the oppressed contingent to whom I minister and recognize the many vicissitudes that impact their lives, I am adequately prepared to show solidarity with them in their struggle to find meaning for their existence and thereby lay claim to their divine birthright as a children of God. For such a time as this, God has incarnated me with a spirit of transcendence and spiritual defiance, whereby week after week in an unbroken refrain I am empowered to proclaim His life-giving truth to folk rushing to a church in an urban ghetto that serves as an asylum of hope, feeding them with Christ, the Bread of life and reminding them of Ezekiel's declaration that their dry bones of despair can live.

Since completing seminary training, God has provided me with wisdom to write two books entitled, *Failure Is Not The problem* and *Joy Cometh In The Morning.* Both books have been well received by the reading public whose generosity has inspired me to produce future works. God has additionally opened doors whereby

---

[9] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 13.

[10] Howard Thurman, *Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 27.

I have been afforded the opportunity to proclaim the gospel of Jesus, the Christ, in several parts of the world, including the continent of Africa and my native Guyana.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

In his book entitled, *Bread in the Wilderness,* Thomas Merton reports that, the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ and continues his teaching and sanctifying office in the midst of us. He argues that, the aim, obligation and function of the Church remains that of bringing humanity to the knowledge, love and contemplation of God and "restoring all things in Christ" who is the light of the world. The Church is therefore entrusted with the greatest of all functions: that of fulfilling the whole purpose of God in creating the universe and in creating man.[1]

Merton's theology is congruent with biblical truth that, the Church consists of living individuals. He states that, it is a kind of "mystical person" composed of many persons who are one in Christ and who share his divine life. The mystical sense of Scripture opines Merton, is then not something which the Church *studies* but something which the Church *lives* and *is.* He is on firm theological ground by arguing that, this state of affairs will not be the case unless individuals who comprise the Church experience in their lives the mystery of Christ.[2] As such, if spiritual growth is absent on the individual level, none will be evident at the corporate level.

One of the impediments eroding the effectiveness of the researcher's faith community in its mission to transform creation, ensues from the fact that a sizeable segment of the

---

[1] Thomas Merton, *Bread In The Wilderness* (New York: New Directions Books, 1953), 41.

[2] Ibid., 37.

church's membership remains spiritually adolescent for an extensive duration of their Christian pilgrimage. On account of this disturbing reality, they are ineffective stewards in the execution of God's plan for the created universe—making disciples of the nations (Matthew 28:19-20).[3] Encumbered with narrow theological horizons, they fail to submit themselves to God as "living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1),[4] in order that He might transform them into His image and likeness—the *imago Dei*. On account of this disturbing reality, the personal knowledge of Christ on which the Church's mission is grounded continues to be seriously compromised (1 John 1:1-4),[5] resulting in Christians living with too cramped a vision of what life in Christ can hold.

The state of spiritual affairs within churches rests heavily and squarely on the shoulders of the church's leadership. Writing in his book entitled, *A Teachable Spirit,* Richard Osmer contends that, to a great extent, the many problems besetting mainline churches today, stem from the fact that in far too many instances churches fail to offer their members a compelling vision of everyday life and do not function as sources of guidance in the pursuit of Christian vocation…Their diminishment [i.e., denominational loyalty and congregational commitment] has made it clear that denominations and congregations are increasingly dependent on their ability to project a vision that supports and transforms persons in their attempt to live to God in their own time and place.[6]

The Book of Revelation affords us an illuminating window concerning God's divine purpose for humanity that reaches beyond history: "Now the dwelling place of God is with

---

[3] Matthew 28:19-20.

[4] Romans 12:1.

[5] 1 John 1:1-4.

[6] Richard Osmer, *A Teachable Spirit* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 175.

men and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God" (Revelation 21:13).[7]

The Old Testament narratives report of God's continual pursuit of His people, Israel, and how through the Hebrew nation and all the nations of the earth are to be blessed. This "pursuit of loving relationship" is revealed in the lives of the Old Testament citizens, capturing in its flow the vexing vicissitudes of four hundred and forty years of Egyptian bondage, exodus from the land of the Pharaohs and entrance into the Promised Land, culminating with the formation and subsequent disintegration of tribe and nation.

Indicating that the two Testaments consists of an organic unity, the New Testament picks up where the Old Testament leaves off and continues to expound God's fulfillment of "loving relationship" with a people who became His own through their identity in Jesus the Messiah:

> Consequently you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling place in which God lives by His spirit" (Ephesians 2:19-22).[8]

The Bible illuminates the truth that God pitched His tent in the ordinary veil of flesh in the personality of Jesus, the Christ. The Almighty intentionally "gave" Himself to humankind as the atoning sacrifice for sin and humankind's response to His "giving" is simply a response to the divine initiative. Jesus said: "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into their house and eat with them"

---

[7] Revelation 21:13.

[8] Ephesians 2:19-22.

(Revelation 3:20).[9] Our Lord is forever the constant Pursuer, always making the first move: He knocks. And if we open to Him, He invites Himself into our home and heart. Ninety-nine percent of the initiative is His. Our small one percent is the act of "giving of ourselves to God," which is crucial, since He made us free persons, not servants, but friends.

In his daily devotional entitled, A *Year With Thomas Merton: Daily Meditations from His Journals,* the author declared: "God gives Himself to those who give themselves to Him."[10] It is evident from Merton's arresting and prophetic words that God's "giving" of Himself to humankind swings on a reciprocal dynamic between Creator and creature. It suggests that as followers of the great Galilean, Jesus of Nazareth, we must *first* be prepared to surrender our self-absorbed agendas to His Lordship, in order that He might offer us *Zoe*—true life that culminates in spiritual transformation.

Henri Nouwen, Roman Catholic priest, twentieth century spiritual leader, and colleague of Merton, resonated with his Catholic brother's insightful sentiment. He opined that, submitting to God creates a space for the Divine in our lives and that, submission entails time and commitment. However, the direction affords for spiritual friendship and provides time, wisdom and discipline necessary for the creation of a sacred space in our lives in which God can act.[11] In support of his thesis, Nouwen writes at another point in his book entitled, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*: "Through a spiritual

---

[9] Revelation 3:20.

[10] Thomas Merton, *A Year With Thomas Merton: Daily Meditations from His Journals* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1989), 69.

[11] Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith,* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2006), XV.

discipline we prevent the world from filling our lives to such an extent that there is no place to listen. A spiritual discipline sets us free.[12]

Appearing to share similar sentiments as Merton and Nouwen, Paul Tillich declared in his book entitled, *The New Being,* that, without a soul opened for it, no word from the Lord could be received. He argues that, listening with an open soul, keeping an empty space in our inner life and sharpening one's spiritual hearing is the only thing that we can do. This however, is much, because blessed are those whose minds and hearts are open."[13]

Howard Thurman, one of America's insightful and outstanding African-American theologians and mentor of the great Civil Rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., declared in his book entitled, *Meditations Of The Heart,* that, the function of spiritual disciplines is that of building immunity against the confusion and distractions of the environment. Thurman believes that they serve to make a clearing in the proverbial woods, in which one might be still. He further argues that, they provide the technique for disentangling the mind and spirit from involvements, that tryst may be kept with the Spirit. He concludes that, spiritual disciplines do not guarantee that the Spirit will be encountered but they do prepare the way of response to its movement."[14]

The common thread embroidering the writings of the four insightful theologians is congruent with biblical evidence that, the "giving" relationship between Creator and creature is reciprocal. It is true that God responds to human initiative on His agenda. However, humankind must be intentional in making themselves available to the overtures of the Spirit.

---

[12] Henri Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 68.

[13] Paul Tillich, *The New Being,* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 124.

[14] Howard Thurman, *Meditations of The Heart* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1953), 39.

Jesus exhorted his disciples: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden light" (Matthew 11:29).[15] Submission to the "yoke" of Jesus is the portal through which we enter the Holy of Holies and come to know the mind of God and be filled with illumined light from heaven. It is the method by which we become anchored in His divine will. It is the *axis mundi* of spiritual growth.

Invoking the biblical language of antiquity, submission to the practice of spiritual disciplines could also be described as submitting oneself to what the Bible describes as "the way" (Isaiah 30:21; Malachi 3:1; Matthew 2:12; John 14:6; 1 Corinthians 12:31).[16] Placing oneself in "the way" by employing spiritual disciplines provides an "address" on the house of our lives; in order that we might be "addressed" by God and transformed at the core of our beings by His mystical light that permeates our whole being.

To become engaged in the practice of spiritual disciplines is to become engaged in the rites of passage of a disciple of Jesus, the Christ. In truth, Christians are called to be life-long disciples, since revelation of the personality of God is a never ending process. Writing in his book entitled, *The Cost Of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonheoffer states:

> Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. It remains an abstract idea, a myth which has a place for the Fatherhood of God, but omits Christ as the living Son. And a Christianity of that kind is nothing more or less than the end of discipleship…because he is the Mediator, for that reason alone the only true relation we can have with him is to follow him. Discipleship is bound to Christ as the Mediator, and where it is properly

---

[15] Matthew 11:29.

[16] Isaiah 30:21; Malachi 3:1; Matthew 2:12; John 16:6; 1 Corinthians 12:31.

> understood, it necessarily implies faith in the Son of God as the Mediator. Only the Mediator, the God-Man can call men to follow him.[17]

The Greek word *mathetes* ("disciple") comes from the verb *manthano* ("to learn"). With this understanding, a disciple is a pupil or a learner.[18] When this concept is applied to the context of the Christian faith, discipleship becomes the process of people being actively mentored by spiritual leaders in a manner that seeks to enhance their spiritual maturity.

In order for the journey of discipleship to be a productive venture, "learners" must receive effective guidance that culminates in a deepening of their relationship with God. In this vein, individuals providing mentoring to disciples must be skillful in assisting those in their charge to avoid pitfalls with the potential of sabotaging their spiritual growth and prevent them from experiencing the deepest possible relationship with God.

Professor Larry Grunden, writing in an unpublished manuscript entitled, *A Manual For Spiritual Coaching: Spiritual Training For Coaching Adults*, addresses the important role played by individuals providing spiritual coaching to others. He states that, beyond the drive for technical knowledge and skills, there is a need to discover deeper values which define what one is all about in this world. Based on this reality, spiritual coaches play an indispensable role in assisting others to arrive at the understanding as to why they exist, what is the meaning of life for them and what they must do with the rest of their lives.[19]

---

[17] Dietrich Bonheoffer, *The Cost Of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillian Publishing Company, 1960), 64.

[18] *Zondervan Expository Dictionary of Bible Words,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 226.

[19] Larry Grunden, "*A Manual For Spiritual Coaching"* (Miamisburg, OH, n. p., 1998), 10.

The concern among many scholars pertaining to the methodology of spiritual coaching is at times an emotionally charged issue. In his book entitled, *Spiritual Theology*, Diogens Allen contends that, a serious deficiency abounds as to how information necessary for spiritual growth is normally presented. He argues that, academic theology has narrowed its focus by not adequately dealing with spiritual theology. This narrowed focus in Allen's estimation has not been effective in assisting disciples to attain the deepest possible relationship with God, because information has customarily been presented in a manner that is primarily "devotional"—intended to warm our hearts but not designed to involve the mind or stimulate theological inquiry. Allen takes the position that, one of the greatest shortcomings with academic theology, is the fact that, it places too much emphasis on the beginning of the Christian story—the experience of Christian conversion—making it appear as though we have already reached our goal at that juncture.[20]

Allen argues that, from the very beginning it has been taught that with God's help, conversion is followed by the effort to overcome the damage done to our human nature by sin and by our own previous predispositions. As such, after conversion we must begin the long process of learning to reign in destructive aspects of our personality. The insightful author believes that, we can hope for transformation because, with conversion our lives become centered on God—with God's help we hope to achieve what we cannot achieve by ourselves.[21]

Allen further argues that, the important division within spiritual theology, referred to as *ascetical theology*, provides us with information as to how we might become

---

[20] Diogenes Allen, *Spiritual Theology: The Theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1997), 3.

[21] Ibid., 8.

knowledgeable in working towards overcoming the damage done to our personalities by sin. He stresses that, "Justification is our forgiveness or pardon by God apart from the law because of Christ's death on the cross; sanctification is the process by which we actually begin to become holy, free of the effects of evil and full of divine love. Justification is the *beginning* of sanctification." The author emphasizes that, both justification and sanctification require divine grace in order to become operational in our lives. This does not mean however, that there is nothing left for us to do. He argues that, it is precisely because of divine grace that we are able to experience unshackling from the effects of sin and evil and begin to love in like manner as Christ loves.[22]

When we examine the lives of legendary biblical personalities who loved in like manner as Christ loves, to the extent that their lives tend to cast long shadows across the pages of the Holy Bible, thereby relegating them to the pantheon of "saints," we discern that the common thread coursing through the texture of each life, is the fact that they experienced Almighty God as the defining reality of their existence. This is quite in opposition to the spiritual superficiality dispensed in scores of post-modern churches offering a consumer-driven and success-oriented theology. In these instances, the gospel message is corrupted by opportunistic charlatans and the ensuing reality of Christians feeding on a counterfeit gospel lacking theological bandwidth and incapable of catalyzing spiritual formation, is the fact that, recipients are rendered spiritually impoverished, possessing no depth or substance concerning the things of God. They are adrift on a theological ocean with no navigational charts and at the mercy of false prophets and profiteers who have nothing to offer, because they [the leaders] never received any directives from God. They were never intentional in "giving" themselves to God, in order that He might "give" Himself to them.

---

[22] Ibid., 9.

The tragic effects of the counterfeit message disseminating from uninformed and untransformed leaders is of grave concern to serious minded Christian leaders. Lamenting on the tragic state of affairs in many post-modern churches in his book entitled, *Celebration of Disciplines*, Richard Foster argues that, superficiality is the curse of our age and that, the doctrine of instant gratification is a spiritual problem. He argues that, the desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for a deep people. Foster is of the firm belief that, the Classical Disciplines of the spiritual life (meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance and celebration), call us to move beyond surface living into the depths. The author contends that, Disciplines urge Christians to be the answer to a hollow world.[23]

Foster cautions that, we should never entertain the misconception that spiritual disciplines are the sole purview of the so-called "spiritual giants" and hence beyond the reach of common folk, or that they are the exclusive property of contemplatives who devote all of their waking hours to prayer and meditation. He contends that, God intends spiritual disciplines be integrated into the daily routines of ordinary people: people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns. He is of the firm belief that, it is in the midst of our relationships with husbands, wives, brothers and sisters, spiritual disciplines are best exercised.[24]

It is not uncommon for some people to entertain the misperception that engaging in spiritual disciplines might be a daunting undertaking far beyond their ability. Foster attempts to allay the fears of skeptics, indicating that, none of us need be well advanced in matters of

---

[23] Richard J. Foster, Celebration Of *Disciplines: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1978), 1.

[24] Ibid., 1.

theology in order to practice the Disciplines. He opines that, recent converts to the Christian faith and even individuals, who have yet to turn their lives over to Christ, can and should practice them. In Foster's opinion the primary requirement needed to become a practitioner, is a longing for God. "As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God" (Psalms 42:1).[25]

While the practice of spiritual disciplines need not be a daunting or overwhelming undertaking for individuals who have heard and responded to the distant call of God deep within the recesses of their spirit, Foster cautions that, we are however confronted with two difficulties. The first is one of a philosophic nature because the materialistic base of our age has become so pervasive that, it tends to reach beyond the materialistic world. He reports that many first rate scientists have progressed beyond such doubts, knowing that we cannot be confined to a space–time box. However, the average person is influenced by popular science, which is a generation behind the times and frequently tends to be prejudiced against the nonmaterial world.[26]

The second difficulty confronting would-be practitioners of spiritual disciplines in the estimation of Foster is one of a practical nature. He contends that, the vast majority of us simply do not know how to go about exploring the inward life. He however states that, such has not always been the case and that, in the first century and even earlier, it was never necessary to provide instruction on how to "do" the spiritual disciplines. The author recognizes that, even though the Bible calls people to engage in the practice of spiritual disciplines, it provides us with almost no instruction on how to go about doing them. From Foster's point of view, the reason for the implied familiarity is based on the fact that, spiritual

---

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 2, 3.

disciplines were practiced on a regular basis and eventually became an integral part of the ancient general culture to the extent that, the "how to" was common knowledge. The author recognizes however, that this familiarity is not the case in the present generation and argues that, in today's world there is an abysmal ignorance of the most simple and practical aspects of nearly all the Classical Spiritual Disciplines. Having arrived at this conclusion, he cautions that, merely being familiar with the mechanics does not mean that we are practicing spiritual disciplines. He argues that, they are an inward and spiritual reality and the inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the mechanics for coming into the reality of the spiritual life. He goes further to state that, life that is pleasing to God is never a series of religious duties. The singular important responsibility of the practitioner engaged in the practice of spiritual disciplines is, that of experiencing a life relationship and intimacy with God, "the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17).[27]

In lieu of the fact that far too many Christians are unfortunately overly preoccupied with ritualistic aspects of worship, Foster emphasizes that, the practice of spiritual disciplines consists of interior work that needs to be taken to heart. He points out that, far too many worship services cater to the externalities of form and fashion. As such, individuals participating in worship services end up missing the real objective of what worship is all about—that of availing themselves to God, in order that He might transform them at the core of their personalities, enabling them to reflect His nature and bear the stamp and imprimatur of His personality.[28]

It is important to recognize that engaging in the practice of spiritual disciplines or placing oneself in "the way" will not in and of itself garner transformation. This is only the

---

[27] Ibid., 3.

[28] Ibid., 4.

initial step on the path culminating in a deepened relationship with God. Authors Lyndia L Graybeal and Julia L. Roller writing in their insightful treatise entitled, *Connecting With God: A Spiritual Formation Guide,* support the argument that, spiritual disciplines in and of themselves have no merit whatsoever. Both authors are in deep solidarity that, Disciplines possess no inherent righteousness, contain no rectitude and that the only purpose they serve is that of a vehicle that places us before God. In the estimation of the authors, after having done so, they come to the end of their usefulness. But this, they caution, is not enough. It is at this juncture that the grace of God becomes operational, receives the simple offering of ourselves and creates out of it persons who embody the goodness of God.[29]

Graybeal and Roller send home the important truth that; spiritual transformation does not ensue from merely engaging in spiritual disciplines. They argue that, it is vitally important to view spiritual training in the context of the work and action of God's grace as the apostle Paul reminds us: "It is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and work for his good" (Philippians 2:13).[30] God does not "give" Himself to us based on "works of righteousness," as it is sometimes called. Our desire for the "with God" kind of life is an action of grace; it is "prevenient grace," as theologians frame it. The real crux of the matter is that, we are not only saved by grace. We live by grace. We pray by grace. We fast by grace. We serve by grace and worship by grace. All of the disciplines are permeated by the enabling grace of God.[31]

---

[29] Lynda L. Graybeal & Julia L. Roller, *Connecting with God: A Spiritual Formation Guide* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2006), xii.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

C.S. Lewis, the English author who is arguably one of the intellectual giants of the twentieth century, commented about grace in his book entitled, *The Problem of Pain.* He concurs with the biblical truth that, God is intimately concerned about the spiritual transformation of humanity, because He "jealously longs for the spirit he has implanted within us" (James 4:4-5).[32]

With the expertise that only he could expound, Lewis skillfully articulates that, God is intimately involved in the spiritual formation of humankind. He argues that, to ask that God's love should be content with us as we are is to ask that God should cease to be God; because He is what He is, His love must, in the nature of things, be impeded and repelled by certain stains in our present character, and because He already loves us He must labor to make us lovable.[33]

In his insightful treatise, Lewis discloses that, God dispenses grace to humankind because in Christendom "Herein in love, not that we love God but that He first loved us" (1 John 4:10). He opines that, God has our welfare at heart and that, we are not separate from our Creator, nor can He misunderstand us. He claims that, the place for which He [God] designs us in His scheme of things is the place for which we were created. When we reach it our nature is fulfilled; a broken bone in the universe has been set, the anguish is over. Employing this world view as a frame of reference, Lewis argues that, when we strive to be something other than the thing God wants us to be, we must be wanting what in fact, will not make us happy.[34]

---

[32] C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1940), 27.

[33] Ibid., 41.

[34] Ibid., 46.

Lewis goes further still to drive home the point that, through grace God "gives" Himself to humankind, in order that we might be transformed in our spirit. He writes that, God gives what He has, not what He has not: He gives the happiness that there is, not the happiness that is not. To be God—to be like God and to share His goodness in creaturely response—to be miserable—these are the three available alternatives. In Lewis's estimation, If we will not learn to eat the only food possible that any universe can ever grow—then we must starve eternally.[35]

Writing at another point, Lewis yet again attempts to demonstrate how God engenders spiritual transformation through grace:

> When a man turns to Christ and seems to be getting on pretty well (in the sense that some of his bad habits are now corrected) he often feels that it would be natural if things went pretty smoothly. When troubles come along—illness, money troubles, new kinds of temptations—he is disappointed. These things, he feels might have been necessary to rouse him and make him repent in his bad old days; but why now? Because God is forcing him on, or up, to a higher level; putting him into situations where he will have to be very much braver, or more patient, or more loving, than he ever dreamed of being before. It seems to us all unnecessary: but that is because we have not yet had the slightest notion of the tremendous thing He means to make of us.[36]

Employing images from Pauline theology (Rom 12:1), Lewis continues his demonstration of God's grace:

> Imagine yourself as a loving house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that the jobs needed doing and so you were not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in such a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building a different house from

---

[35] Ibid., 47.

[36] C.C. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2002), 162.

> the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.[37]

While there should be no doubt on the reader's part concerning Lewis' demonstration of God's grace towards humankind, he skillfully articulates that, pertaining to spiritual formation one needs to be intentional in order that God might "give" Himself to us. He argues that, the new step from being creatures to being sons is voluntary, at least in one sense. It is not voluntary in the sense that we, ourselves, could have chosen to take it or could have imagined it; but it is voluntary in the sense that when it is offered to us, we can refuse it. We can, if we please, shrink back; we can did our heels in and let the new humanity go on without us.[38]

Continuing his argument that we need to be intentional in "seeking" God, in order that He might "give" Himself to us, Lewis writes that, becoming new men entails losing what we now call 'ourselves.' Out of ourselves into Christ we must go. His will is to become ours and we are to think His thoughts, to 'have the mind of Christ' as the Bible says. And if Christ is one, and if he is thus to be 'in' us at all, shall we be exactly the same? It certainly sound like it; but in fact it is not so.[39]

Concluding the argument that, we must be intentional in "seeking" God, in order that He might "give" Himself to us and transform us at the core, Lewis writes that, there must be a giving up of the self. The seeker must throw it away 'blindly' so to speak. Christ will

---

[37] Ibid., 163.

[38] Ibid., 173.

[39] Ibid., 175.

indeed give them personality: but one must not go to him for the sake of that. As long as one's personality is what they are bothering about, they are not going to him at all. The very first step is to attempt to forget about the self altogether. The real, new self (which is Christ's and also yours, and yours just because it is his) will not come as long as one is looking for it. It will come when one is not looking for him."[40]

The preceding references lend credence to the fact that, developing a deepened relationship with God entails the practice of spiritual disciplines that intentionally sets one on the path indicating to God that they are desirous of being transformed by him. It was additionally posited that, skilled mentors play an indispensable role in providing guidance to individuals willing to place themselves in "the way." Additionally, information presented to individuals in search of a deepened relationship with God must be conducive to spiritual formation, instead of merely catering to devotional aspects of worship.

Commenting on the qualifications of spiritual mentors in his book entitled, *Wasting Time With God: A Christian Spirituality of Friendship With God,* Klaus Issler argues that, a primary and essential quality is that, spiritual guides be possessed by the Spirit, evidenced in 'holiness of life, closeness to God.' Second, they should be individuals of experience 'who have struggled with the realities of prayer and life.' Third, spiritual guides should be individuals 'steeped in Scripture.' Fourth, they should be individuals of discernment, 'of perception and insight, people of vision, capable of reading the signs of the times, the writing

---

[40] Ibid., 176.

on the walls of the soul.' Finally, they should be individuals who 'give way to the Holy Spirit.' Such individuals are fellow travelers on the journey to know God.[41]

Individuals in pursuit of a deepened relationship with God must demonstrate their willingness to partner with our Lord in his suffering. The Psalmist declared, "Taste and see that the Lord is good…" (Psalm 34:8).[42] In order to "taste" the Lord and experience his goodness, Christians must be willing to eat our Lord's flesh and drink his blood. In other words, we must embrace his admonition to daily take up our cross and share in his suffering (Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).[43] Being yoked with our Lord means being yoked to him in every aspect of his existence— even his death and his resurrection. It is by staking our existence on the resurrection life of Jesus that we are able to walk in the light as God is in the light.

Sharing his perspective on the issue of suffering Issler writes:

> Suffering engenders rather than endangers deepening trust in God. Because while enrolled in God's school of suffering, regardless of the injustices experienced or the culpability of others for doing us harm, we are given the opportunity to deepen our faith and reliance on God. But to make progress, every believer must yield to God's fatherly role as he grows us to become' conformed to the likeness of his Son.[44]

Writing in *Weavings,* John S. Mogabgab declares:

> Suffering with Christ occupies a place of privilege in the spiritual life because it signals the presence of God's new creation, God's passion for abundant life confronting and confounding the power of death. Such suffering is no passive or hopeless submission to the world's mean streets. Like the blaze intentionally set to stop the advance of uncontrolled forest fire, suffering in Christ courageously deprives the hot spots on our planet of the resources that feed division

---

[41] Klaus Issler, *Wasting Time With God: A Christian Spirituality of Friendship With God* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 181.

[42] Psalm 34:8.

[43] Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23.

[44] Issler, *Wasting Time With God,* 185.

> and conflict. With Christ through faith, and in him by grace, we embrace the vulnerability of God's love for the world and live in the liberty of that love in the midst of the world.[45]

While Christians pursuing a deepened relationship with God will undoubtedly encounter suffering, this in no way is the conclusion of the matter. Jesus reminded his disciples: "In the world you have tribulation; but be of *good cheer* (emphasis added), I have overcome the world (John 16:33).[46]

Suffering is never the end of the story in God's economy. While it might be an indispensable desert arena in which followers of the great Galilean are oftentimes consigned during their pilgrimage towards spiritual maturity, it is merely a crucible utilized by God in which we become catalyzed by the crisis that confronting us. Commenting on the issue of suffering in his book entitled, *Bread in the Wilderness,* Thomas Merton reminds us that, suffering is not the cause of holiness but only its occasion. He argues that, we are made saints not by undergoing pain but by overcoming it. That is why the Cross means joy and not despair, life and not death, fulfillment and not annihilation.[47]

---

[45] John S. Mogabgab, "Editor's Introduction." *Weavings 17* (September/October, 2002), 2.

[46] John 16:33.

[47] Merton, *Bread In The Wilderness,* 91.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The practice of spiritual disciplines is an imperative and not merely an option for those who confess and profess allegiance and loyalty to Jesus, the Christ. In order to fully "know" the mind of Christ, Christians must unconditionally place themselves at God's disposal, in order that He might transform them at the core of their being. This "placing" is accomplished through the practice of spiritual disciplines. In other words, Christians must be intentional in "asking," "seeking" and "knocking" (Matthew 7:7),[1] in order that they might access a new realm of righteousness and intimacy with God, culminating with the appropriation of God's revealed image.

In his book entitled, *The Cost of Discipleship,* Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."[2] The essence of discipleship is encapsulated in these strident words, because it is congruent with biblical truth. In order to open ourselves up the invasion of God's Holy Spirit that the Son of God is formed in us, we must first be prepared to "die" to personal agendas. In the words of the apostle Paul, we must be prepared to "die daily" (1 Corinthians 15:31).[3]

---

[1] Matthew 7:7.

[2] Dietrich Bonhoffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillian Publishing Company, 1960), 86.

[3] 1 Corinthians 15:31.

The apostle from Tarsus declared at another point, "I am crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"(Galatians 2:20).[4] Commenting on this verse of scripture in his daily devotional entitled, *My Utmost for His Highest,* Oswald Chambers argues that, being crucified with Christ does not merely mean imitating, or simply indicating one's desire to follow him. He indicates that, being crucified with Christ entails being *identified* with the Lord in his death. He goes further to state that, when an individual arrives at such a moral decision and acts on it, what Christ did for them on the Cross becomes alive within them and the free committal of the individual's life to God affords the Holy Spirit the opportunity to impart to them the holiness of Jesus Christ.[5]

The practice of spiritual disciplines has its genesis in Old Testament times. Beginning with the prophet Moses, God employed selected individuals as intermediaries or conduits between Himself and His people. The expressed mission of these intermediaries was that of receiving God's ordinances from Him and revealing them to His people, in an effort to keep them on the path of righteous living.

In addition to the establishment of the prophetic line dating back to Moses, God also initiated a priesthood beginning with Aaron, Moses' brother, supported by a cadre of Levites who were specially trained to assist Aaron in the execution of temple rituals and regulations. The priesthood was God's way of short-circuiting the viscous cycle of sin, punishment and death that entrapped Israel. Without priests to mediate between God and the people, the entire nation would have been destroyed by His anger. The priesthood was also a gift for the priests themselves, affording them the

---

[4] Galatians 2:20.

[5] Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1953), 81.

privilege of dedicating their lives in service to God and having a special relationship with Him.

From a historical perspective, spiritual disciplines played an indispensable role in preparing individuals to serve as intermediaries between God and his people. Since these individuals were instruments that were wholly set apart and dedicated to God's purpose, it is unthinkable that there would be no established protocol of spiritual training they were required to engage in.

The biblical record reveals that God chose intermediaries at various stations of life. In the case of the law-giver, Moses, God appointed him while he was at a relatively advanced age and employed at the time as a shepherd in the Midian desert tending his father-in-law's flock.[6] God also chose individuals when they were extremely young, as in the case of the prophet Samuel who was a mere infant when he was taken to the temple at Shiloh by his parents, Hannah and Elkanah. [7]

The Hebrew name for Samuel is *Shemu* el or *name of God, or his name is El.* The Book of First Samuel reports that, the future prophet of Israel was taken to the temple by his parents while he was yet an infant, in order that the resident prophet, Eli, might raise their male child. The biblical record indicates that, before giving birth to Samuel, Hannah was unable to conceive children. She was so distraught by the social stigma attached to her barren condition that she fervently petitioned God to reverse her inability to become impregnated (1 Samuel 1:10).[8] God honored Hannah's prayer and she gave birth to a son. After weaning the child, she handed him over to

---

[6] Exodus 3.

[7] 1 Samuel 1:24.

[8] 1 Samuel 1:10.

Eli, in order that the old prophet might take the lad under his wings and raise him in the tradition of the Aaronic priesthood.[9]

Hannah's decision to dedicate her son to God as an instrument for His use is a marvelous example for all humanity. In the first place, she gave back to God the very thing that she desired most in life—a son. She returned to God the life He entrusted to her that ultimately took away the stigma of barrenness and reproach among women and provided her with a semblance of wholeness. Additionally, she dedicated her son to God, in order that he might discover his true calling as he received sage tutelage from Eli and came to understand God's will for his life. In like manner as God sacrificed His best in the person of Jesus, the Christ, in order that He might reconcile the world back to Himself, God calls modern day believers to submit themselves to His Lordship, in order that He might establish each of us in our divine right place.

Scripture reports that at a tender age God established contact with Samuel and made Himself known to the lad. Samuel was initially unaware that Jehovah communed with humans in the most intimate of ways and it took coaching and guidance on the part of Eli to instruct the future prophet as to the manner by which he should respond to the Divine initiative (1 Samuel 3:4-14).[10]

While the biblical record is silent on the specific instructions Samuel received from Eli as it pertains to the protocols of spiritual coaching, it is evident that the mentoring he received enabled him to engage in dialogue with Jehovah, to the extent that God was able to reveal His mind to him. This truth is evidenced by the fact that

---

[9] 1 Samuel 1:24.

[10] 1 Samuel 3:4-14.

after the death of Eli, Samuel assumed the prophetic office to become the great prophet-judge who was instrumental in uniting the scattered tribes of Israel under the leadership of a single king, Saul. It is a biblical fact that at a certain period in Israel's history God entrusted the spiritual welfare of the nation to Samuel. Even though credit is given to Israel's first king, Saul, for establishing The United Kingdom of Israel on or about 1051 B.C. E., without the efforts of Samuel this event would never have become a reality.

Another Old Testament example where the practice of spiritual disciples played an indispensable role in shaping the destiny of the nation of Israel was the relationship between the prophet Elijah and his young apprentice, Elisha.

The name Elijah or *eliyahu* in Hebrew means "Jehovah is God." The prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:1-2Kings 2:12)[11] was a Benjamite and son of Jeroham, resident at Jerusalem. His ministry was set in the days of King Ahab (c. 874-852 B.C.E.) of the northern kingdom of Israel. He was born in Tishbe and is described as one of the settlers in Gilead (1 Kings 17:1).[12] Elijah was the nemesis of Ahab and his Nabatean wife Jezebel, both of whom he opposed for instituting Baal worship as the court religion of Israel. In order to cultivate a deepened relationship with Elijah, God separated His prophet to a three year long apprenticeship in the desert, in order that He might provide him with spiritual insights that would be instrumental in shaping their future relationship (1 Kings 17).[13]

---

[11] 1 Kings 17:1-2, Kings 2:12.

[12] 1 kings 17:1.

[13] 1 Kings 17.

Elisha or *Eliseus,* was the successor of Elijah (1 Kings 19:16-21).[14] The biblical record indicates that the young apprentice persisted in following Elijah until he witnessed the older prophet being translated up to heaven by chariots of fire. Because he witnessed his mentor's translation to the heavenly plane, a double portion of Elijah's spirit was bequeathed to Elisha by Jehovah (2 Kings 2:9-12).[15]

After assuming the prophetic mantle from the departed Elijah, Elisha had an extensive and productive ministry spanning the reigns of three kings, Joram, Jehu, and Jehoash. However, an important aspect of his ministry is the fact that he assumed leadership of the school of prophets in Israel, an office which he inherited from Elijah (2 Kings 4:1).[16]

From the beginning of the prophetic and priestly offices, the biblical record is silent on the actual training regimen that existed between mentors and apprentices in their charge. However, since it was imperative that God's intermediaries be familiar with His ordinances, in order that they might assume the highest office of spiritual leadership within the nation of Israel, we are on solid footing by arguing that, God's intermediaries were undoubtedly subjected to a regimen of spiritual disciplines which prepared them for their weighty responsibilities. As earlier alluded to, Moses was mentored by God for a period of forty years in the wilderness. The biblical record

---

[14] 1 Kings 19:16-21.

[15] 2 Kings 2:9-12.

[16] 2 Kings 4:1.

indicates that there has not arisen a prophet in Israel since, whom the Lord knew face to face (Deuteronomy 34:10).[17]

Yet another Old Testament example where someone developed the capacity to discern the mind of God through the practice of spiritual disciplines is the case of Daniel, who was numbered among the first wave of Israelites deported to Babylon on the first of three occasions by the Babylonian king.[18]

After Babylon was conquered by the combined forces of the Medes and Persians, Daniel was elevated to the office of what might be referred to in these days as Chancellor, or Secretary of State, under Darius.[19] His office carried great honor and responsibility and involved grave personal danger to the office holder. In the oriental world it was unlikely that one could occupy such an office without incurring powerful enemies who were apt to make short work of inconvenient officials in high places.

The biblical report reveals that, a carefully engineered plot was hatched by opponents of Daniel, which placed his patron, Darius, in the position of being absolutely helpless to save him. Caught up in the net of intrigue, Daniel was summarily arrested, taken down to a pit of lions and deposited among the wild beasts. Scripture indicates that, *Daniel had acquired the habit of prayer* (Daniel 6:10).[20] In other words, he was someone who practiced the Presence of God on a regular basis—

---

[17] Deuteronomy 34:10.

[18] Daniel 1:6.

[19] Daniel 6:2.

[20] Daniel 6:10.

was brewing; he immediately started to pray about his predicament. It is evident that Daniel was not simply someone who pronounced an affirmation once or twice a week and expected it work, like an incantation. He prayed three times a day, *"His windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem."* Spiritually speaking the "chamber" is the "secret place" of Jesus, or the seat of the consciousness. Theologically speaking, Jerusalem is our highest nature or personality, short of the actual realization of God; and so Daniel, three times a day, turned to God and raised his thought as high as he possibly could. This is biblical evidence that the practice of spiritual disciplines, particularly prayer, will get us out of any difficulty, whether or not we receive any realization or not. It matters not what the outcome might be, we should always open our spiritual windows towards Jerusalem. In other words, we should always keep ourselves open to the Presence of God.

It is clear from Daniel's example that the practice of spiritual disciplines ushered him to a deepened relationship with God, whereby he was able to establish contact with the Creator on a regular basis. As such, when he encountered the dark night of the soul, this practice stood by him, affording God the opportunity to reveal to His servant future events that were about to befall him. Because Daniel trusted God implicitly, he was rescued from imminent death.[21]

The inference that the practice of spiritual disciplines was operational in Israel since the time of Moses and played a pivotal role in reviving the cult in Jerusalem after the exiles returned to Judah from captivity in Babylon is supported by evidence culled from both biblical and historical veins of information:

---

[21] Daniel 6:24.

Writing in his book entitled, *A History Of Israel*, John Bright states:

> The Destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile mark the great watershed of Israel's history. At a stroke her national existence was ended and, with it, all the institutions in which her corporate life had expressed itself; they would never be re-created in precisely the same form again. The state destroyed and the state cult perforce suspended, the old national-cultic community was broken, and Israel was left for the moment an agglomeration of uprooted and beaten individuals, by no external mark any longer a people. The marvel is that her history did not end altogether. Nevertheless, Israel both survived the calamity and, forming a new community out of the wreckage of the old, resumed her life as a people. Her faith, disciplined and strengthened, likewise survived and gradually found the direction that it would follow through all the centuries to come. In the exile and beyond it, Judaism was born.[22]

To accurately chronicle the history of Israel during the period of the exile is difficult in the extreme. Available biblical sources are at best inadequate. Of the exile itself the Bible informs us very little, except that which is available from the prophetic writings of the day. For the post-exilic period down to the late fifth century, our only historical source is the concluding portion of the Chronicler's work found in Ezra-Nehemiah. Even though the certitude of remaining questions confront us, we are still fortunate enough to draw on available sources that provide us with evidence substantiating the continuity of the practice of spiritual disciplines in the pre-exilic and post-exilic communities.

Very little is known about what occurred in Judah for the fifty or so years following the destruction of the Solomon's Temple. As the normalization of life ensued and the situation quieted down, many refugees drifted back to Judah (cf. Jeremiah 40:11-12), rejoined the population left behind and there eked out an

---

[22] John Bright, *A History Of Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 343.

existence of sorts.[23] As for the temple, though burned to the ground, it remained a holy spot to which pilgrims continuously journeyed to offer sacrifices to the blackened ruins (Jeremiah 41:5).[24]

The Jews exiled to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar represented the cream of their country's political, ecclesiastical, and intellectual leadership—which is the primary reason that they were targeted for deportation. Their number was by no means large. In Jeremiah 52:28-30 precise totals for three deportations are given, and the sum for all is only 4,600. This is believed to be a reasonable figure. Though it probably only accounts for adult males, the grand total is not considered to have been more than three or four times that number. But these exiles, though few in number, were primarily the ones who would shape Israel's future, both giving to her faith its new direction and providing the impulse for the ultimate restoration of the Jewish community in Palestine.[25]

John Bright argues that, while we should in no way minimize the hardships and the humiliation that the exiles were subjected to, their lot were not considered unduly severe. Transported to southern Mesopotamia not far from Babylon itself, they were not dispersed among the local population, but apparently consigned to settlements of their own (cf. Ezekiel 3:15; Ezra 2:59; 8:17) in a sort of internment. They were by no means free souls, but they were not prisoners either. They were afforded the opportunity to build houses, engage in agriculture (Jeremiah 29:5), and

---

[23] Jeremiah 40:11-12.

[24] Jeremiah 41:5.

[25] Bright, *History Of Israel*, 345.

apparently, to earn their livelihood in any way they could. They were able to assemble and to continue some sort of community life (cf. Ezekiel 8:1; 14:1; 33:30).[26] On account of the freedom afforded the exile community in Babylon, many of them achieved high levels of financial wealth as they adjusted in life to their new home.

When we consider the magnitude of the calamity that rocked Israel, it is simply amazing that she was not sucked down into the vortex of history, to lose forever her identity as a people. And if one asks why she was not, the answer lies in her faith: the faith that called her into being in the first place proved sufficient even for her great calamity.[27]

With the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, the nation's theological emergency reached crisis proportions. The dogma upon which state and cult were erected had been dealt a mortal blow. This had been recognized as the assurance of Yahweh's eternal choice of Zion as His earthly seat and His unconditional promise to David of a dynasty that would never end. Sheltered by that dogma, the nation rested secure and rejected prophetic warnings to the contrary as unthinkable heresy, confidently awaited Yahweh's mighty intervention and a future that would bring the ideal scion of David's line—perhaps the next one—under whom Yahweh's righteous and beneficent rule would be triumphantly established and all the dynastic promises made actual. This was the destination of the national trajectory toward which the nation aspired. Nebuchadnezzar's army of course breached that theology beyond repair. It was a false theology and the prophets who had proclaimed

---

[26] Ibid., 346.

[27] Ibid., 347.

it had lied (Lamentations 2:14). It could never be held in precisely the old form again.[28]

Severe though the testing proved to be, Israel's faith successfully met the challenge, essentially that of supplying an adequate theological explanation for the national disaster and of keeping alive some spark of hope for the future, had in fact already been provided in advance by the very prophets who had presided over the tragedy, particularly Jeremiah and Ezekiel. By incessantly announcing that it was Yahweh's righteous judgment on the nation's sin, these prophets gave the tragedy coherent explanation and permitted it to be viewed, not as the contradiction, but as the vindication of Israel's historic faith. Their affirmation provided Jews with hope to which they could cling, enabling them to envision the exile as merited punishment and a purge in preparing Israel for a new future. By assuring the people that Yahweh was not far from them, the prophets prepared the way for the formation of a new community.[29] A new community did, in fact emerge, though the details are somewhat obscure. It was no longer a national-cultic community, but one marked by adherence to tradition and law.

A pivotal event occurred on the world scene that conspired to bring credence to the prophetic affirmations of some of Israel's prophets: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Ezra and Isaiah, to name a few. The life-changing event was the conquering of Babylon by Cyrus, the Persian leader. With the fall of Babylon, Israel suddenly fell under the sphere of influence of the dominant world power, mighty Persia.

---

[28] Ibid., 348.

[29] Ibid., 349.

In the first year of his reign in Babylon, Cyrus issued a decree ordering the restoration of the Jewish community and cult in Palestine. The Bible provides us with two reports of this: in Ezra 1:2-4 and in chap. 6:3-5.[30]

Cyrus not only issued the decree ordering the rebuilding of the Jewish temple, he additionally permitted Jews who wished to return to their homeland do so; Jews remaining in Babylon were invited to assist the venture with contributions. The rebuilding project was placed in the hands of Shesh-bazzar "prince of Judah," who was also given explicit instructions to return the sacred vessels that were removed from the temple in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.[31]

Additionally, the financial costs of the rebuilding effort would be financed by the royal treasury (Ezra 6:8).[32]

Shesh-bazzar departed Babylon for Jerusalem with an unknown number of exiles who were fired by their spiritual leader's vision of acting as change agents that would be instrumental in the shaping of Israel's destiny (Ezra 1:5; Ezra 2; Nehemiah 7).

The biblical report is sparse concerning the fortunes of the initial party and to compound matters, the Chronicler appears to have telescoped Shesh-bazzar's career with that of his nephew and successor, Zerubbabel. Ezra 5:14 tells us that Cyrus appointed Shesh-bazzar "governor" and he obviously set out rebuilding the temple

---

[30] Ibid., 361.

[31] Ibid., 361.

[32] Ezra 6:8.

soon after having received his marching orders. However, it is unclear at what point in time Zerubabbel arrived in Jerusalem, but their labors undoubtedly overlapped and Zerubabbel is credited with being the builder of the temple.[33]

Though no report concerning temple worship is given in connection with Shesh-bazzar, it is almost certain that some regular cultus was resumed subsequent to his arrival. It is likely that a cultus of sorts continued all the while the temple lay in ruins (cf. Jeremiah 41:5). In all likelihood this was sporadic and in the view of the newcomers, irregular. As such, a new beginning had to be made. The resumption of the cult marked the true beginning of the restoration. It might have appeared to be anemic initially, but nevertheless a beginning. Loyal Jews were inspired to take heart; worshippers of Yahweh with their strong sense of election were buoyed with the expectation that their history would not end, but continue.[34]

While the rebuilding effort fell under the purview of Shesh-bazzar and later to his nephew, Zerubabbel, direction of spiritual affairs were assumed by the high priest Joshua ben Jehozadak (Haggai 1:1; Ezra 3:2) a man of Zadokite lineage born in the exile (1 Chronicles 6:15).[35]

Work continued in the rebuilding effort until March, 515, at which time the building was completed with great rejoicing (Ezra 6:13-18).[36] unfortunately, of the fortunes of the Jewish community very little is known following the completion of the Temple.

---

[33] Ibid., 363.

[34] Ibid., 364.

[35] Ibid., 366.

[36] Ibid., 372.

Construction of the temple provided the Jews with a rallying place and gave them the status of a worshipping community. Although religious laxity was pervasive, there is no concrete evidence that any other cult place flourished in Judah, leading us to believe that the ritual of the pre-exilic Temple was restored.[37]

Even though the Second Temple was completed there was not altogether smooth sailing. While temple worship was resumed, the state of religious affairs was somewhat lacking. As only God could orchestrate in order to effectuate a corrective, he placed the prophet Ezra on the scene in Jerusalem.

Ezra's status is concealed in the title "scribe of the law of the God of heaven" (Ezra 7:12). He was "Royal Secretary for the Law of God of Heaven" (i.e., the God of Israel) or to modernize somewhat, "Minister of State for Jewish Religious Affairs."[38]

It is unclear how Ezra came to receive his commission. We do know that he was a priest (Ezra 7:2) and certainly a representative of the position of Babylonian Jews who had been upset by the laxity of religious affairs in Judah and was desirous of seeing things corrected. The fact that such a script was issued indicates Jewish influence on the Persian court.[39]

As it pertained to religious matters, Ezra came armed with a copy of the law, together with a rescript from the king granting him sweeping powers to reinforce it. Specifically (Ezra 7:25), he was empowered to teach the Jews living in the satrapy of Abar-nahara and set up an administrative system to see that it was obeyed (Persian

---

[37] Ibid., 378.

[38] Ibid., 386.

[39] Ibid.

leaders relegated geographical areas known as satrapies to the jurisdiction of administrators known as satraps).[40]

Ezra was not primarily concerned with ritual aspects of temple worship; he was concerned about the *reason* for worship. He was primarily concerned about lighting a path that revealed to his people the true *Essence* of life and how in their individual lives they might appropriate to themselves life from God that afforded them reason for living and surviving as a nation. He was concerned about transformative living.

The biblical record is clear that beginning in ancient times the practice of spiritual disciplines has been a rite of passage for the people of God. Through the practice of spiritual disciplines, men and women of God developed the capacity to make God the mainspring of their desiring. Proverbs 22:6 exhorts: "Train up a child in the way that he should go and when he is old he will not depart there from."[41] Training in spiritual disciplines is the God-ordained method for bringing God's people into perfect harmony with His divine will and purpose.

The Old Testament covenant of Sinai, while good in its place, attempted to order spiritual life from the outside. This "Law" was legalistic and incapable of transforming humankind at the core of their being. In the words of the apostle Paul, it was the "letter which killeth," as opposed to the "spirit which giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:6).[42]As such, God saw fit to send His only begotten son, Jesus, in the form of sinful flesh to die on Calvary, to atone for the sins of humankind, thereby

---

[40] Ibid.
[41] Proverbs 22:6.

[42] 2 Corinthians 3:6.

redeeming them and bringing them back into a right relationship with Him (Romans 10:4).[43]

At the very tender age of twelve when he paid his first visit to the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus demonstrated that his consuming passion was Kingdom business (Luke 2:49).[44] Throughout the brief three or so years of his earthly ministry, he seized every possible opportunity to reveal that he was God's truth incarnated in human flesh and capable of transforming humankind at the core of their personality. He stated at one point: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6).[45] If we were asked to sum up the Christian message we might concur with Paul that it is the message of a "New Creation." In the Apostle Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth, he states: "If anyone be in Christ he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).[46]

In the words of Paul Tillich, Christianity is the message of the New Creation, the New Being and the New Reality which appeared with the appearance of Jesus Christ who for this reason and just for this reason is called the Christ. For the Christ, the Message, the selected and anointed one is He who brings the new state of things.[47]

The message of Jesus' intention of inaugurating a new state of things is encapsulated in his words: "I come that you might have life, and have it more

---

[43] Romans 10:4.

[44] Luke 2:49.

[45] John 14:6.

[46] 2 Corinthians 5:17.

[47] Paul Tillich, *The New Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 15.

abundantly" (John 10:10).[48] He demonstrated throughout his earthly ministry that some sense of connection with the Spirit is the spiritual birthright of the children of God and this is accomplished by becoming yoked with Him (Matthew 11:29).[49]

In his book entitled, *The Shaking Of The Foundations,* Paul Tillich indicates that the "yoke" of Jesus was not merely a new demand, a new doctrine, or new morals, but rather a new reality, a new being and a new power of transforming life. He stated that, by calling it a yoke, Jesus meant that it comes from above and grasps us with a saving force.[50]

The New Testament provides us with ample evidence that throughout his earthly ministry Jesus regularly engaged in the practice of practiced spiritual disciplines, in like manner as the prophets preceding him. He recognized the imperative of inculcating these precepts in the lives of his disciples, in order that they, like he, might experience the flowering of the deepest human capacities, the interior growth of the *imago Dei*. Employing the metaphor of the vine, Jesus exhorted his disciples to live in him and allow him to live in them—as deeply, integrally connected as a vine and its branches. He declared: "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5).[51]

"Abiding" is the way by which disciples of Jesus align themselves with and submit to the truth of the Lord's teaching, in order that they might open themselves

---

[48] John 10:10.

[49] Matthew 11:29.

[50] Paul Tillich, *The Shaking Of The Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 99.

[51] John 15:4-5.

up to the invasive rush of the Holy Spirit. The biblical evidence demonstrates that, Christians are exhorted to remain indissolubly attached to Jesus, the true vine "that Jesus may dwell in our hearts" (Ephesians 3:17).[52] The essence of our call is a mystical union with Christ so deep that we, "being rooted and grounded in love," may know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge," that we "may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17,19).[53]

The premise of this thesis ensues from the fact that, in the researcher's estimation the vast majority of the members of my faith community fail to develop a deepening of their relationship with God because they lack training in spiritual disciplines. As such, they remain ignorant as to how the Disciplines might assist them in cultivating the deepest possible connection with The Divine, capable of ushering them beyond the initial knowledge of God they experienced at the time of their conversion.

In addition to those individuals that have been on the Christian journey for some time and are frequently referred to as "seasoned" Christians, the lack of training in spiritual disciplines is also reflected in the lives of new converts to the faith. Converts lack a structured pathway whereby they might learn the art of availing or "giving" themselves to God, in order that He might likewise respond by "giving" Himself to them. Ignorant of how they might cultivate a deepening of their relationship with God, they attempt to make a go of the Christian journey on their own strength—by "works of righteousness." In a very short period of time they come

---

[52] Ephesians 3:17.

[53] Ephesians 3:17, 19.

to the realization that "works" are incapable of keeping them anchored in the way of the Cross and lacking both the spiritual resources and guidance that would enable them to engage in spiritual warfare and fight the good fight of faith, many of them become spiritually fatigued when confronted by adversity, give up the faith and eventually drop out of fellowship. This is proof positive that the practice of spiritual disciplines could short-circuit the falling away of Christians from the Body of Christ, since it is the established pathway whereby one makes themselves available to God, in order that the Creator might transform them at the core of their being.

One might question why spiritual transformation is essential to the Christian way of life. The answer is that while a convert is deemed to be a "new" creation who has been redeemed back to God based entirely on the finished work of Christ on Calvary, they are spiritually speaking "babes" in Christ who have not yet adequately matured to engage in spiritual warfare. They have not yet developed the requisite staying power acquired through the agencies of the Holy Spirit that empowers them to do battle against satanic forces. As such, they first need to be endued with supernatural power on a daily basis. It is therefore imperative that they understand the directive to "walk in a newness of life," in order that they might cultivate the deepest possible relationship with God, whereby He might impart to them the Holy Spirit that will teach them all the things they need to know (John 14:26).[54]

Christian theology informs us in the Book of Genesis that, on account of the Fall of Man, humankind experienced separation from God. On the other hand, the New Testament informs us that, through the sacrificial death of Christ on Calvary, a way has been opened whereby we might experience reunion with the Love of our

[54] John 14:26.

lives. Theologically speaking, the so-called Fall of Man refers to the separation from God brought about by willful human disobedience. Separation or alienation from God resulted in human beings losing their sense of "sonship and "daughtership" with God. As such, they conducted themselves in ways that sabotaged their divine birthright, leading to further alienation from a loving Father and ending in self-destruction. Augustine fingered it: "Thou hast made us for thyself O God, and our hearts are restless until they come to rest in thee." To remedy the restlessness in the heart of alienated human beings, God sent His son, Jesus, as an atoning sacrifice, to reunite fallen humanity back into the Godhead. This reality is encapsulated in Jesus' prayer for his disciples and for all humanity: "Father I wish that they were one even as we are one" (John 17:22-23).[55]

In order for us to become reunited with God, it is imperative that we first become intimately acquainted with the mind and will of God and this is accomplished through the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2),[56] in lieu of the fact that the carnal mind is at enmity with God and cannot please God. The apostle Paul exhorts: "Let this mind also be in you that was in Christ Jesus."[57] Knowing the mind or personality of God is primarily accomplished through the study of His word. However, God engenders transformation of the mind through the practice of spiritual disciplines, since they serve as avenues whereby Christians might avail themselves to Him, thereby affording Him the opportunity to reveal to them His will for their lives.

---

[55] John 17:22-23.

[56] Romans 12:2.

[57] Philippians 2:5.

Jesus' declaration in the temple in Jerusalem at age twelve demonstrated that, he recognized the imperative of laying hold of the Kingdom of God as the primary objective of the spiritual life. He told his disciples, "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).[58]

Theologically speaking, righteousness means having a right standing before God. And a right standing before God could only be attained by ordering one's life through a transformed mind, which is the prerequisite or *sine qua non* for discerning the mind and Kingdom of God. Jesus said at another point: "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).[59] In other words, the Kingdom of God is a transformed mind of a believer that envisions unity with God. It envisions Life with God as its natural habitat. The transformed mind is the mind that is totally submissive to the dictates of God's Holy Spirit.

Metaphorically speaking, the transformed or renewed mind is portrayed in the parable of the Prodigal Son, who returned and submitted himself to the will of his father after straying into a "far country" (Matthew 21).[60] Seeking the kingdom of God necessitates the surrender of one's self-willed ideations aided by the practice of spiritual disciplines, whereby God is afforded the opportunity to imbue believers with new life as they remain open to His transformative power.

In like manner as the Prodigal Son came to his senses and relinquished his pig pen lifestyle after his sojourn in "far country," it is imperative that followers of Jesus relinquish thought patterns that entice them stray from God and lust after spiritual pig

---

[58] Matthew 6:33.

[59] Luke 17:21.

[60] Matthew 21.

food—negative and self-defeating pursuits that offer no life and embrace ones that engender transformation and sanctification.

The Bible bears witness to the argument that, the practice of spiritual disciplines is the means whereby followers of Christ avail themselves to God, in order that He might transform them at the core. However, it is important to bear in mind that the practice of spiritual disciplines is not intended to be a ritualistic exercise designed to reap rewards from a placated Deity. Spiritual disciplines would be absolutely meaningless if God did not respond to our efforts by providing us with *Zoe*—real life through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. It could be said that, the practice of spiritual disciplines is the means whereby we get our house ready for the Guest and that Holy Spirit is the transforming agent.

While the Law received by Moses at Sinai acted as our schoolmaster to point us to God,[61] the Holy Spirit empowers us with supernatural life from God. This reality is evidenced by the words of Jesus: "If you love me…I will ask the Father and He will give you another Comforter" (John 14:15-16).[62] The reality of being empowered by God's Spirit prompted the apostle John to state, "Greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4)." In other words, the Holy Spirit is not a passive observer in our struggles; through our exercise of faith, He actually takes up residence within our being, availing us supernatural power to meet any situation that might confront us in life.

---

[61] Galatians 3:24.

[62] John 14:15-16.

Thomas Merton wrote that, faith is like the feet wherewith our soul journeys to God.[63] And that our awareness of God is a supernatural participation in the light by which He reveals Himself interiorly as dwelling in our inmost self. Merton argues that, the Christian mystical experience is not only an awareness of the inner self, but also, by a supernatural intensification of faith, it is an experiential grasp of God as present within our inner self. The Gethsemane monk opines that, the mystical life culminating in God is an experience beyond all description and which is only possible because the soul has been completely "transformed in God" so as to become, so to speak, "one spirit" with Him.[64]

Merton's words are congruent with the sentiment of Paul Tillich and Pauline theology, in light of the fact that the sum total of the Christian religion is about the New Creation, "the Spirit bears witness with ours spirit that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16).[65] Tillich concurs with the biblical evidence that, "Something new has come, a new reality, a new being, a Spirit distinguished from our spirit, yet able to make itself understood to our spirit, beyond us and yet in us." He argues that, the whole message of Christianity is contained in this statement and that, Christianity overcomes law and despair by the certainty that we are children of God.[66]

It is the researcher's opinion that, the Christian message indicating that we are children of God is frequently frivolously bandied about as a sentimental phrase in far too modern day faith communities, mine notwithstanding. The emphasis on

---

[63] Thomas Merton, *Inner Experience* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2003), 16.

[64] Ibid., 12.

[65] Romans 8:16.

[66] Tillich, *Shaking Of The Foundations*, 135.

evangelical mode of preaching and Christian education and the paucity of competent instructors to provide instructions in the practice of spiritual disciplines has prevented far too many parishioners from embracing the paradoxical reality of the fatherhood of God and moving beyond the rudiments of conversion to a deepening of their relationship with their heavenly Father. The lack of spiritual depth in the lives of parishioners hinders "the spirit of bondage" to fear from being fully overcome by "the spirit of adoption." As such, when confronted with trials and tribulations of life as prophesied by Jesus in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:18-30; Mark 4:3-9; Luke 8:5-8),[67] large numbers of parishioners who have been on the Christian journey for many years and recent converts to the Church, abandon the faith because they fail to experience a deepening of their relationship with the Divine. The corrective to the besetting dilemma is that of training competent individuals in the practice of spiritual disciplines who will instruct parishioners the rudiments of the ancient "way" to God, thereby allowing them to experience a deepening of their relationship with their Creator.

Evidence highlighting the lack of skilled spiritual coaches in my faith community begs the question as to what or who is a spiritual coach. Writing in *A Manual For Spiritual Coaching: Spiritual Training For Coaching Adults*, professor Larry Grunden defines a spiritual coach as, "One who is a personal guide, wise person, and spiritual role model in the process of developing consciousness of a

---

[67] Matthew 13:18-30; Mark 4:3-9 & Luke 8:5-8.

Higher presence, call to a higher purpose, and transforming to a spiritual self."[68] Professor Grunden argues that, a spiritual coach can help individuals to connect with a divine source which will ultimately enhance their lives. He claims that, "A spiritual coach is a professional with interdisciplinary knowledge about human behavior, culture, organizations, religions, and, spiritual practices, and can reframe this knowledge for the spiritual development of individuals and systems."[69]

Having defined who or what a spiritual coach, professor Grunden posits eight reasons why spiritual coaches are needed today:

To Help Adults Spiritually Manage Change

Professor Grunden's first reason as to why spiritual coaches are needed today is the fact that we are participating in the greatest period of change in the history of humankind and as a coping mechanism, individuals are designing their own spiritual beliefs, which puts pressure on religious organizations to change in order to survive. He claims that, some people tend to oversimplify the problem by desiring to move backwards to the 1950's in response to a complex world. He argues that, the necessity for change is camouflaged at this juncture by the illusion that we can become less complex and provide simple answers to new and challenging problems. Others, he opines, tend to embrace a "whatever works" approach, weaving together an incongruent variety of spiritual fads and techniques which provide little depth. What is needed in the estimation of professor Grunden, is the development of spirituality

---

[68] Larry Grunden, *"A Manual For Spiritual Coaching"*: Spi*ritual Training For Coaching Adults* (Miamisburg, OH, n. p., 1998), 29.

[69] Ibid.

which enables consistent growth and gives a sense of staying on course in a turbulent world. He claims that, spiritual coaches can work with people in an effort to keep them connected with God and discover who and where God is in their lives through change. Spiritual coaches can also help those individuals who are in a transition period to discover a Greater Power with the help of the renewal cycle.[70]

Help People Develop a Spirituality Which Has Soul and Spirit

A familiar hymn of the Church acknowledges that, "Life is filled with swift transitions."[71] Congruent with this sentiment, professor Grunden argues that, as people move through the ups and downs of life, a spiritually is needed which has substance, yet flexible. He believes that, such spirituality is one that resides in the hearts and lives of people, rather than one which is entombed in doctrinal writings. He defines a flexible spirituality as being able to understand one's connection with the Divine in every phase of life and encourages movement with life rather than resistance to it. In professor Grunden's estimation, flexibility is inspired by the spirit which broadens the horizons and that the substance of spirituality comes from finding God within.[72]

Professor Grunden points to the fact that, the terms "spirit" and "soul" are often used interchangeably, even though they have different meanings in relation to God. He argues that, the soul is the imaginary part of the self that calls us to a purpose and nudges us when it is not being fulfilled. He claims that, in order to satisfy the

---

[70] Ibid., 5,6.

[71] Jennie Wilson, "*Hold to God's Unchanging Hand.*" *The National Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Trian Publications, 1977), 248.

[72] Ibid., 7.

quest of the soul the lessons of life need to be learned and the power of the past must be relinquished. The soul, according to professor Grunden, acts like a gyroscope, enabling individuals to stay on course during periods of change. As such, spiritual coaches can facilitate the journey into the soul as they help people to understand their sense of call.[73]

As it pertains to the spirit, professor Grunden argues that, this aspect of our existence directs us in soaring to new heights of success and renewal. It brings life, whereas the soul dwells in heaviness and darkness. He argues that, the spirit breaks through the ordinary, in order that new visions and possibilities never dreamed of might be realized. It also enables improvisation with life direction, especially when navigating the unknown and moving in directions never previously taken.[74]

Spiritual breakthroughs are essentially ventures into uncharted territory. In the words of professor Grunden, they are epiphanies that crystallize an understanding of self in relation to God, nature and others; and they change life. In this vein, spiritual coaches can engage others in developing an awareness of spiritual experience and the meaning and direction it provides.[75]

---

[73] Ibid., 7, 8.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

To Renew the Church

Professor Grunden highlights the truth that, churches grow when the people within the institutions grow and that the beginning point for every religious institution must be the people and their lives. He points out that, at the same time God is speaking through scripture, prayer, and the life of Christ, providing answers that affect and shape the life of believers. He argues that, faith is a necessary ingredient in the life process and we must actively seek answers from traditional sources. He goes further to state that, faithfulness ensues from the commitment to a system of belief that speak to everyday lives and as God continues to speak to us, we continue to apply spiritual truths to our lives in order to be shaped by them. He claims that, it is by this dynamic that the church continues to be in the process of renewal as it seeks to speak to the lives of its people in the pews, calling them to a life of Christ. In light of this reality, spiritual coaches can work with individuals and groups as they develop systems of belief and open an atmosphere of growth.[76]

To Connect Individuals with Faith Communities

Professor Grunden reminds us that, even though spiritual experience is a solitary and individual reality, it is shared in an open community of faith. He points out however, that many individuals with active spiritual lives do not participate in religious communities and that, practicing an affirming faith with others is not important to them as being connected to all things in nature, for instance. He believes however, that something is missing without community involvement and that, being

---

[76] Ibid., 8,9.

with others who are working out their sense of connectedness, learning, and growing, can be an exciting endeavor. Spiritual coaches, according to professor Grunden, can play the vital role of connecting individuals with others in their faith community. He also believes that in light of the unpredictable crises evident in modern society, skills in collaboration and consensus are needed in the work world and spiritual coaches can help people connect with others and develop community building skills. He further believes that beyond the development of these skills, spiritual coaches can help folks to understand the spiritual basis of community.[77]

To Elicit Core Values

Since the dawning of history, human beings have been captivated with the quest to understand their existence. Professor Grunden fingered this reality: "There is an unheard longing for spiritual connections which informs us of who we really are and helps clarify a sense of purpose for living in an anxious world."[78]

Spiritual awareness, according to professor Grunden, is more that the ability "to delineate options, opt for the best choices, and remain open to new possibilities." He believes that, spiritual awareness is a way of understanding self and values in relation to God in the context of life. This understanding leads to fulfilling a purpose which is more than a cognitive activity, because it answers the question as to why one exists, what is the meaning of life and what one must do with the rest of their life. These questions in the estimation of professor Grunden must be answered before one can plan their future, because decisions are shaped by the answers from which we

[77] Ibid., 9, 10.

[78] Ibid., 10.

take our cue and the manner in which our lives unfold in relation to them. Spiritual coaches play an important role in guiding individuals through the process of maximizing spiritual learning of spiritual values at every age.[79]

To Promote a Process of Spiritual Practice

Professor Grunden highlights the truth that the imperative of getting along with others is crucial in today's world. He reminds us that, we live in chaotic and insecure times and in those instances when they are stripped of security and control, people tend to function on a more primitive level. They may even seek to control others on their own terms. In the estimation of professor Grunden, spirituality offers a way of developing greater insight to self through utilization of the enneagram and life experiences, and letting go of destructive desires. This fosters deeper commonalities by which interpersonal connections are made.[80]

In addition to enneagram and life experience to gain a better understanding their existence, people down through the centuries have relied on prayer for spiritual development. As such, another technique employed for the promotion of spiritual formation is lectio divina, or meditation on the scriptures. In this process, a word is taken from the Bible and employed in meditation. According to professor Grunden, it can be thought about in the everyday world, and can have an effect on one's life situation, thereby preventing one from sinking to a primitive level of behavior. Professor Grunden additionally believes that spiritual coaches can advocate for the spiritual self, which enables individuals to withhold immediate fulfillment of self-

---

[79] Ibid., 10, 11.

[80] Ibid., 11.

gratifying needs, in order that a higher purpose can be developed and fulfilled in every situation of life. He also believes that spiritual coaches can advocate for an understanding of the larger spiritual picture and focus on that which is most important in re-establishing life purpose and direction, in addition to being a guide in the process of replacing ego centeredness with spiritual centeredness.[81]

To Enlarge the Reorientation of Personal Lives

Through spiritual disciplines, we take the initiative of opening ourselves to the presence of God as we experience epiphanies of awareness in daily life. The awareness of God's presence, according to professor Grunden, creates the desire within us to live and praise God, to align our lives with His purpose and call, and to attend to the daily tasks of engaging our gifts. Since we grow by reorienting our lives in order to discover and respond to the Divine intention in us, professor Grunden argues that, spiritual coaches can encourage movement away from the false self and nurture the discovery of the spiritual self through an empowering connection with God. The spiritual coach can also assist individuals in being able to clarify choices at each fork in the road of life, a sense of Divine intention through the call, and beneficial steps that can lead to an authentic reorientation of one's life around God. Additionally, the spiritual coach can teach the practices necessary to sustain a centered life.[82]

---

[81] Ibid., 11, 12.

[82] Ibid., 13, 14.

To Cultivate an Awareness of Jesus

As it pertains to the Christian faith, Jesus is our model for living. However, professor Grunden reminds us of the important fact that he is more than a good man who lived at one point in history. He is instead a divine personality that connects us with God, thereby bridging the gap between an elusive God and the concrete needs of people in the world.[83] Professor Grunden's sentiments are congruent with that of Thomas Merton, who states in his book entitled, *The Ascent to Truth*: "Christ was not a wise man who came to teach a doctrine. He is God, Who became incarnate in order to effect a mystical transformation of mankind.[84]

Professor Grunden points out that, the spiritual coach can facilitate the indispensible role of connecting people to Jesus through scripture that portray him both as fully God and fully man. Also, since the greatest spiritual need in our lives is for transcendence, spiritual coaches can assist people in cultivating the kind of faith whereby they discover the power of transcendence in their lives, see themselves as Jesus sees them and be able to mine their God-given potential and employ their spiritual gifts. Last, but certainly not least, since every Christian did not come to the knowledge of Christ in a non-threatening way, spiritual coaches can act as incarnations of Christ to individuals, embodying the love of God, by reaching out with grace and connecting them with the Divine.

---

[83] Ibid., 14, 15.

[84] Thomas Merton, *The Ascent to Truth* (New York: Harvest Book, 1979), 11.

The writer fully concurs with the sentiments of professor Grunden outlined above. However, in light of the on-going tensions in many churches pertaining to female clergy being denied equal rights to leadership positions, this pressing issue must be addressed. The primary reason for this denial is the fact that many churches subscribe literally to mandate of the apostle Paul in his declaration: "The women should keep silent in churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is a shameful thing for such a woman to speak in church." (1 Corinthians 14:34-35).[85]

In light of the fact that there is a deep chasm of misunderstanding in some circles as to whether or not women "belong" in the pulpit, fueled by smoldering tensions remaining from the Feminist and Womanist movements of the late sixties and seventies that agitated for equal for women in all spheres of society, the writer sees the imperative of broadening professor Grunden's thesis, emphasizing the use of both male and female pronouns by Spiritual Coaches, when invoking the name of God. This sentiment has been posited by author Sallie McFague in her book entitled, *Models of God.* The author states: "The most obvious is that since human beings are male and female, if we seek to imagine God 'in the image of God'—that is ourselves—both male and female metaphors should be employed." She further states: "If we use only the male pronoun, we fall into idolatry, forgetting that God is beyond male and female—a fact that the use of both pronouns brings home to us the reality of

[85] 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

God as Father and Mother."[86] The employment of feminine pronouns is not merely meant to be politically correct, but that of supporting the fact that the Creator has feminine manifestations—*El Shaddai*—the many-breasted God. In addition to the fact that God is at times revealed with feminine characteristics, feminine gender has its parallel in other aspects of Scripture. For example, in wisdom literature wisdom has always been denoted by the feminine gender (e.g. Proverbs 31).[87] In this vein the utilization of feminine gender on the part of spiritual coaches when invoking the name of God will go a long way in bridging the divide between male clergy and their female counterparts because it will acknowledge equality between the sexes.

In addition to the employment of both male and female pronouns when invoking the name of God, the writer would further broaden professor Grunden's list of what spiritual coaches can do by emphasizing that, they need to be skillful in addressing intercultural issues. In her book entitled, *A Credible Witness: Reflections on Power, Evangelism and Race,* Brenda Salter McNeil argues that, "Christians must become interculturally competent if they are to cross the divides of age, gender, ethnicity, race, class, social status and religion in order to share the gospel."[88]

America's great Civil Rights Leader, the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is credited with having said that eleven o' clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in American society. As someone who was intimately familiar with the racial pulse of American society, Dr. King pointed out that the vast majority of

---

[86] Sally McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 98-99.

[87] Proverbs 31.

[88] Brenda Salter McNeil, *A Credible Witness: Reflections on Power, Evangelism and Race* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 19.

churches in American society are organized along racial lines. The so-called "Black Church" in America was birthed during the era of American slavery when blacks were prohibited from worshipping with their white counterparts, but even after the era of slavery and segregation, the Body of Christ has remained segregated along racial lines. This reality has been highlighted by the late James Washington in his book, *Frustrated Fellowship.*[89]

Brenda Salter McNeil argues that a church that is not unified is a scandal and a contradiction of the gospel.[90] In this late hour of the twentieth first century when Christians of various ethnic groups remain balkanized in their places of worship along racial lines, she reminds us that, "On the cross Jesus reconciled us to God, and he also reconciled us to each other—in the same act of salvation." She argues that because of the sacrificial death of Jesus on Calvary, there are no divisions or barriers that separate us from God. To choose Christ, she claims, is to choose his community. According to Ephesians 2, Jesus died in order that we could have peace with God and with each other. As a result of our Lord's heroic sacrifice we are now members of God's family—a new, blood-related people group. Men and women, girls and boys, the young and the old, people from different social classes, ethnic backgrounds and religious traditions have been reconciled and are now of the same household.[91]

During his brief thirty nine years of life on planet earth and his indefatigable struggle for racial equality among all people, one of the main objectives of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was that of inaugurating what he termed the "The Beloved

---

[89] James Melvin Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press).

[90] McNeil, *A Credible Witness*, 11.

[91] Ibid., 16.

Community," in which all of God's children regardless of ethnic differences would recognize their brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ. Dr King believed that, all men are caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. He believed that, someone can never be what they ought to be until the other party becomes what they ought to be and vice versa.[92]

It is the researcher's opinion that spiritual coaches are afforded the unique opportunity of playing an indispensable role of ensuring that Dr. King's Beloved Community becomes a reality not only in American society, but in the world at large. Their efforts to promote racial solidarity would ensure that, the horizontal aspect of the Cross becomes evident in the world. This is certainly congruent with Brenda Salter McNeil's sentiment that, the truth of the gospel highlights the reality that we are all members of one household. She argues that, this reality is an unusual and compelling truth in a twentieth first century world that is marred by war, broken relationships, racial and ethnic strife and economic divisions. She believes that, when people see Christians living out the reality of being one, multiethnic, multilingual, multicultural and multinational family in Christ, it grabs their attention, piques their curiosity and causes them to wonder what makes them that way. She opines that this is the lifestyle that Jesus called us to in Matthew 5:16: "Let your light so shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." The author concludes that a corporate witness to the reality of reconciliation is perfect demonstration of the gospel. And our unity in the midst of our diversity is

---

[92] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength To Love* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1963), 7.

one of the most powerful ways we reveal the reality of what Jesus accomplished on the cross.[93]

In the humble researcher's opinion, another important way in which spiritual coaches can be of assistance to individuals is in the area of accountability. Henri Nouwen puts it this way:

> A spiritual director is someone you ask you to hold you accountable for exercising the disciplines of the spiritual life. Spiritual direction, the ancient practice and provision for receiving such needed help, offers prayerful presence, wise counsel, and careful guidance by a spiritual friend who is sensitive to the movements of the spirit and familiar with the disciplines of the traditions."[94] He further states: A spiritual director in this strict sense is not a counselor, therapist or an analyst, but a mature fellow Christian to whom we choose to be accountable for living our spiritual life and from whom we can expect prayerful support in our constant struggle to discern God's activity. A spiritual director can be called a "soul friend" whom we trust to offer wisdom and guidance.[95]

Concluding with the thoughts of Thomas Merton, we are reminded that the mystery of the hypostatic union, or the union of the divine and human natures in the one person of the Word, the God-Man, Jesus the Christ, was not only a truth of the greatest, most revolutionary, and most existential actuality, but it was the actual truth of all being and all history.[96] This great and glorious truth of the divine birthright of every human being has been passed down from Moses and remains alive in modern day believers in Jesus, the Christ

---

[93] McNeil, *A Credible Witness*, 16.

[94] Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Directions: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 2006), 67.

[95] Ibid., 23.

[96] Merton, *The Inner Experience,* 39.

through the practice of spiritual disciplines as they avail Themselves to "the way" whereby He might illuminate our path and provide us with meaning for the living of our days.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The project served as a unique forum to highlight the plausibility of implementing a structured program designed to educate leaders in the practice of spiritual disciplines, with the expressed purpose of engendering a heightened state of spiritual awareness within the general membership of Berean Missionary Baptist Church, culminating with a deepening of their relationship with God.

The objective for implementing the project ensued from the fact that in the researcher's estimation, the vast majority of parishioners fail to experience a deepening of their relationship with God, beyond the level they experienced at the time of conversion. The practice of spiritual disciplines is essential in fostering a deepening of one's relationship with God, because it affords individuals the opportunity to avail themselves to God, in order that He might impart to them His nature and establish them in their divine destiny.

The hypothesis of the study is based on the assumption that leaders within the faith community will acquire a deep understanding of spiritual disciplines on account of having participated in the project and thereby become better equipped to instruct others in the practice of the Disciplines. As such, the first priority of the project was geared towards educating participants concerning the implications of incorporating the practice of the Disciplines in their daily lives and the second priority entailed equipping them with the tools needed to instruct others in the practice of the Disciplines. At the conclusion of the project,

leaders will not merely acquire knowledge of spiritual disciplines; they will additionally become skilled practitioners, capable of translating acquired knowledge into active ministry.

In attempting to engender a heightened state of spiritual awareness within the general congregation by means of the practice of spiritual disciplines, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Did the study promote a heightened awareness of the importance of spiritual disciplines in the minds of participants?

2. Was there a discernable increase in both knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines on the part of the participants between the inception and conclusion of the study?

3. Was there a qualitative change in spiritual formation on the part of participants as a direct result of their participation in the program?

The goals of the project aimed to identify individuals within the context of the faith community that, in the researcher's estimation demonstrated seriousness about enhancing their spiritual growth and the spiritual growth of others within the faith community. Additionally, it sought to ascertain whether or not they were receptive to new ideas that would enable them to participate in the development of a model serving as a template designed to instruct other members of the faith community in the practice of spiritual disciplines.

The design of the model employed in the field experience consisted of a selection process that was entirely voluntary and involved six individuals of varying ages and religious experiences. The design centered on "generalizing from a sample to a larger population, in order that inferences could be made about characteristics, attitudes and behavior of similar groups."[1]

---

[1] John W. Creswell, *Research Design Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 118.

The research methodology employed in the study utilized the action research (AR) method. AR refers to the conjunction of three elements: research, action and participation. It is a form of research that generates knowledge claims for the express purpose of embarking on some sort of intervention to promote change that empowers individuals to control their individual destinies and to keep improving their capacities to do so.[2] The study sought to explore how the incorporation of spiritual disciplines in the lives of individuals would enable them to experience a deepening of their relationship with God, whereby they become acquainted with His purpose for their lives.

An identical pre-test and post-test questionnaire was administered at both the beginning and conclusion of the study (Appendix C). Information was additionally obtained from journal entries of each participant and notes gleaned by the researcher during workshops.

Data obtained from each participant during the administration of both the pre-test and post-test were numerical responses to fourteen questions developed by the researcher. Data for the pre-test and post-test were compared with each other to ascertain whether or not there were any quantitative changes in each participant's pre-test and post-test orientation, in addition to percentage change for individual questions on the part of the entire population. Reasons influencing change were weighed against information gleaned from discussion groups, journal entries and observations on the part of the researcher. The following graph (Table #1), was designed by the researcher and reflect pre-test and post-test results for the entire population. Readers are afforded the opportunity to compare pre-test and post-test

---

[2] Davydd J. Greenwood, *Introduction to Action Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 6.

results and note how participants responded to each question during the administration of each test.

Table #1: Pre-test and post-test results for the entire population.

	PRE-TEST DATA Questions															POST-TEST DATA Questions													
ID#																												
001																												
002																												
003																												
004																												
005																												
006																												

In addition to comparing pre-test and post test results for the entire population (Table #1) pre-test and post-test results for individual responses to questions are compared with each other in ascending order (Table #2).

Table #2: Pre-test and post-test results per individual question.

	ID #1		ID# 2		ID# 3		ID# 4		ID# 5		ID#6	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
S1												
S2												
S3												
S4												
S5												
S6												
S7												
S8												
S9												
S10												
S11												
S12												
S13												
S14												

In addition to noting numerical changes to individual responses occurring between the administration of the pre-test and the post-test, percentage changes for each question generated by the entire population between the administration of the pre-test and the post-test was also determined. The following graph which was also designed by the researcher and depicted as Table #3, was employed to reflect the percentage change of each question by the entire population that occurred between the administration of the pre-test and the post-test. Numerical variability for individual questions occurring between the administration of the pre-test and post-test and percentage variability for individual questions on the part of the entire population indicated that learning occurred because of the study intervention.

Table #3: Percentage change of pre-test and post-test data for the entire population.

	PRE-TEST		**POST-TEST**	
	No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Total number in population				
Number who strongly disagreed				
Number who disagreed				
Number who were uncertain				
Number who strongly agreed				
Number who strongly agreed				

The project lasted for the duration of six weeks with each session dedicated to a specific topic. Sessions were guided by points for reflection intended to shape discussion.

SESSION ONE

The lecture for the first session centered on how to incorporate spiritual disciplines in our lives, in order to experience spiritual growth. To aid discussion, participants were provided with a handout entitled, *What Is Spiritual Growth?: A Study of Spiritual Theology,* by Diogenes Allen and presented by Larry Grunden. After being given ample time to read and digest the article, including the Cycle of Spiritual Experience/Renewal that is part of the handout. The exercise afforded participants the opportunity to locate themselves at some point in the Cycle (Appendix B). The objective of locating oneself at some point within the Cycle was to prompt participants into thinking about their spiritual condition and to determine whether or not there were adjustments they could make in their lifestyle that would engender a deepening of their relationship with God.

Points for reflection:

1. How might the Cycle of Spiritual Experience assist in accessing our spiritual condition?
2. What is the purpose of spirituality?
3. How do you practice your spirituality? (prayer, meditation, journaling, being in nature, etc.).

SESSION TWO

The lecture for the second session centered on Bible Study and the theological basis for employing the Bible as a means for developing a deepening of one's relationship with God. During this session information was provided pertaining to the Classical Spiritual Disciplines (The Inward Disciplines: Meditation, Prayer, Fasting, Study. The Outward Disciplines: Simplicity, Solitude, Submission, Service. The Corporate Disciplines: Confession, Worship, Guidance, Celebration).

Points for reflection:

1. Do you recognize the Bible as the inspired word of God and the blueprint as to how you should live?
2. Do you believe that God reveals His will for the world in the pages of the Bible?
3. Do you believe that the life of Jesus displayed in the Bible provides us with a model for the practice of spiritual disciplines?

SESSION THREE

The lecture for the third session centered on prayer as a vehicle for spiritual growth. Employing the Bible as a guide and reference to the life of Jesus and other so-called "pillars" of the Christian faith, participants were prompted to explore the theological basis for prayer and how it played an indispensable role in shaping the spiritual trajectory of great men and women of faith and how it might do the same for each of us. During the session, participants were introduced to different kinds of prayers and encouraged to explore how prayer affords us access to God, in order that we might discern His will for our lives. Participants were additionally encouraged to reflect on their attitude to prayer, in order to ascertain whether or

not there might be impediments hindering their prayer life and adjustments that might be implemented that would enable them to develop a robust prayer life leading to a deepened relationship with God.

Points for reflection:

1. Employing the prayer life of Jesus as an example, how might each of us cultivate a deepening of our life with God through the spiritual discipline of prayer?
2. What are some of the things one might do in order to cultivate a disciplined prayer life?
3. Are there different kinds of prayer?

SESSION FOUR

The lecture for the fourth session centered on human bodies as agents of spirituality. Employing several biblical references, participants were afforded the opportunity to explore the myriad ways by which we might employ our bodies as agents of spirituality, in order to glorify God and develop a deepening of our relationship with Him. Employing passages exhorting us to "Glorify God in our bodies,"[3] and that our bodies are the "temple" of the Holy Spirit,[4] participants were encouraged to explore various ways by which we might glorify and honor God in our bodies, in lieu of the fact that God chooses our bodies as a location in which the Holy Spirit might reside. In like manner as Mary became the *Theotokus*—God carrier, participants were encouraged to visualize themselves as "carriers" of the Holy Spirit.

---

[3] 1 Corinthians 6:20.

[4] 1 Corinthians 6:19.

Points for reflection:

1. What does it mean theologically that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit?

2. Consider ways by which we might glorify God in our bodies?

3. Consider ways by which our bodies might be employed as instruments of revelation and reconciliation?
4.

SESSION FIVE

The lecture for the fifth session centered on the issue of commitment and spiritual disciplines, whereby Christians become intentional in providing space in their lives for God, in order that they might come to "know" the mind of God. Participants were reminded that we live in a time where there are numerous idols competing for both our time and attention, our religious activities notwithstanding. With so many options clamoring for our loyalty, we frequently find ourselves left with meager quality time and end up giving God the dregs or leftovers of our time. The lecture explored how to make commitment to God the number one priority of our lives, by setting aside premium time for Him on a daily basis, in order that we might cultivate a deepening of our relationship with Him that culminates in spiritual growth.

Points for reflection:

1. Reflecting on the life of Jesus, consider ways by which we might set aside premium time for God on a daily basis.

2. Reflecting on the life of Jesus (He began his ministry with a forty day fast to prepare himself for the battle with Satan (Matthew 4:1-2; also Mark 1:12-13), how might we prepare ourselves on a daily basis to confront the onslaughts of Satan?

3. Reflecting on the exhortation of John of the Cross: "Determine in your heart that you want to reach the highest place in God." How might we conduct our lives in a manner that this ideal might become a reality?
4.

SESSION SIX

The lecture for session six centered on faith as an indispensable ingredient in the practice of spiritual disciplines. Biblical references were incorporated in the lecture to demonstrate that spiritual growth is nurtured by one's faith and that the lack of faith on the part of any spiritual aspirant would be an exercise in futility, since the Bible states: "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6).[5] The researcher employed the metaphor of an electric grid system to explain the relationship between spiritual disciplines and faith, by pointing out that while spiritual disciplines formed the scaffolding or delivery system of the grid, faith is the electrical current that energizes the grid.

Points for reflection:

1. Since God is invisible, yet real, consider ways, by which we might draw near to Him.
2. What does the apostle Paul mean by, "We walk by faith and not by sight?
3. What does the apostle Paul mean by, "Without faith it is impossible to please God?

The setting for the study is an urban church located in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, New York, with a membership roll of 3000 parishioners. However on any given Sunday there are approximately 500 to 600 members in attendance. In addition to the senior pastor, the church has 16 associate ministers.

---

[5] Hebrews 11:6.

New York City is located at the Southeastern lip of the State of New York, one of the most populous states in the United States of America. The State consists of five boroughs, namely, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island and has a population of 8.2 million residents.[6]

Brooklyn is affectionately referred to as "The Borough of Churches," due to the large number of churches located within its borders. It was an independent city until its consolidation into New York City in 1898 and has a residential population of 2.5 million people. Statics indicate that 41.20% of the borough's population is white, 36.44% is African American, 7.5% is Asian, .41% is Native American, 0.06% is Pacific Islander, 19.79% is Hispanic and 10.05% is categorized as "other.

The conceptual model that formed the basis of research, data collection and analysis is rooted in three components:

(a) Historical

(b) Biblical

(c) Theological

The historical framework for the study ensues from the fact that the practice of spiritual disciplines has a historic precedent rooted in Old Testament and New Testament examples and is a useful vehicle by which the spirituality of the Christian community might be enhanced.

The biblical framework ensues from the fact that the practice of spiritual disciplines is congruent with biblical practice and has been utilized down through the centuries by men and women of faith, to include Jesus, the Christ.

---

[6] Community Board 8, Brooklyn, http://www.brooklyn8.org/needs2007.htm (Accessed August 2007).

The theological framework ensues from the fact that the practice of spiritual disciplines affords for the deepening of one's relationship with God because they enable us to create space in our lives for Him by placing us on "the way" whereby He might fashion us into the *Imago Dei.*

Two months before the project was implemented, this researcher approached several individuals and discussed the rationale for training a core group of individuals in the practice of spiritual disciplines. Ten individuals initially demonstrated their willingness to participate in the pilot program. However, as the start date approached, only six of them indicated that it was unlikely that would be able to participate in the study. The four individuals that opted out of the project work in New York City. They indicated that it would be unlikely that they would be able to arrive on time at the meeting place, due to excessive train delays occurring between New York City during the winter months when the study was conducted.

The personal demographics of the participants of the study reflected a cross section of the general church membership. One participant is a male youth minister, a young man in his twenties. The other is a female youth minister, a young woman in her late thirties. Two other participants consisted of a husband and wife team, both belonging to the Newborn Ministry and they are individuals between the ages of thirty and forty. The two remaining participants are both officers of Berean Church—a male deacon in his fifties and the other individual is the church's Minister of Pastoral Care, a minister in his seventies. Each participant signed a confidential statement indicating that they would refrain from divulging events that transpired during study sessions and that they reserved the right to opt out of the study at any time should they choose to do so.

The researcher utilized the methodology which allowed for the triangulation approach employing multiple sources of data: information gleaned from journal entries, discussion sessions, readings, Bible studies and personal observation.

Before the launching of the first session, a pre-test was administered to the six participants of the project. The pre-test attempted to ascertain each individual's knowledge of spiritual disciplines by employing questions designed by the researcher (see Appendix B). The significance of individual responses was stressed and how responses inform the outcome. The Likert scale was subsequently applied as a lens through which each response was filtered for numerical evaluation.

A Likert scale is a type of psychometric response frequently employed in questionnaires and is widely used in scale survey research. When responding to a Likert questionnaire item, respondents usually specify their level of agreement to a statement or any kind of subjective or objective evaluation of the statement by utilizing numerical ratings between the numbers one to five. After a Likert questionnaire is completed, each item may be analyzed separately or item responses may be summed to create a score for the entire group of items that can be compared against each other or as a whole. Hence, they are often called summative scales.

The researcher chose to employ the Likert scale to apply a numerical rating to the responses of the model, because the statements presented in the questionnaire were attitudinal type questions that tended to focus on internal responses. The responses can be employed as the basis for demonstrating that quantitative changes occurred, which signifies that learning occurred on the part of the participants, as a result of the implementation of model.

At the conclusion of the project, the identical Likert design that was applied to the pre-test was applied to the post post-test, in order to ascertain whether or not there was a qualitative change both in the level of their knowledge and practice in the area of spiritual disciplines that generated spiritual growth.

Shortly after all data was collected, findings were recorded to maintain freshness and integrity. In addition to making note of the results generated by the pre-test and post-test questionnaire, the researcher examined individual journal entries, in an effort to discern similarities and divergent points of view as it pertained to specific themes. After examining pre-test and post-test results and analyzing individual journal entries and factoring in observations made by the researches, the question as to whether or not the project was effective vehicle in educating a core group in the practice of spiritual disciplines whereby they might cultivate a deepened relationship with God was feasible was a resounding "Yes!"

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

The six week project designed by the researcher to instruct leaders in the practice of spiritual disciplines was fielded at the Berean Missionary Baptist Church, Brooklyn, New York. The objective of the study aimed at the establishment of a pathway whereby parishioners might avail themselves to God, in order to cultivate a deepening of their relationship with Him. The model utilized feedback from lecture sessions, discussion groups, journal entries and observation on the part of the researcher, as the foundation upon which participants could establish a platform for future endeavors in the area of spiritual disciplines.

Before conducting the first session of the study, a pre-test questionnaire was administered to each of the six participants, in an effort to ascertain the level of their understanding of spiritual disciplines. Each individual was assigned an identification number to ensure confidentiality of having participated in the study. At the end of six weeks, the identical questionnaire that was administered at the pre-test was administered at the post-test. The results generated at the post-test indicated that each participant scored significantly higher on more than 90% of the questions than they did on the pre-test. This was a clear indication that due to their participation in the study, each individual's awareness and understanding of spiritual disciplines was significantly enhanced in a way that provided them with increased awareness as to how they might avail themselves to God, in order that they might experience a deepening of their relationship with Him and be subjected to His transformative power. The empirical results of the study are reflected in Table #1 which

compares individual pre-test and post-test results for the entire population. Table #2 compares the pre-test and post-test response for each individual question. Table #3 through Table #16 reflect the percentage change in perception for individual questions on the part of the entire population occurring between the administration of the pre-test and the post-test.

Table #1. Pre-test and post-test data for the entire population person

Table #1. Pre-test and post-test data for the entire population person

	PRE-TEST DATA Questions														POST-TEST DATA Questions													
ID#	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
001	3	3	1	3	5	2	4	2	3	3	4	1	3	1	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	1	5	4	5	5
002	3	3	1	3	4	4	4	2	3	3	3	1	3	1	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	1	5	5	5	5
003	1	3	1	1	5	2	3	2	2	3	3	1	3	1	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	1	5	5	5	5
004	3	3	1	3	4	1	3	1	2	2	3	2	3	1	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	1	5	5	5	5
005	3	3	1	3	4	2	4	2	3	3	3	2	3	1	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	1	5	5	5	5
006	2	2	1	2	4	2	3	2	2	2	3	1	3	1	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	1	5	5	5	5

Table #2: Pre-test and post-test results per individual question

ID # 001			ID#00 2		ID#003		ID# 00 4		ID# 005		ID# 006	
Pre-Test		Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Q1	3	5	3	5	1	5	3	5	3	5	2	5
Q2	3	5	3	5	3	5	3	5	3	5	2	5
Q3	1	5	3	5	1	5	1	5	1	5	1	5
Q4	3	5	3	5	1	5	3	5	3	5	2	5
Q5	5	5	3	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	5
Q6	2	4	4	4	2	4	1	5	2	5	2	5
Q7	4	5	4	5	3	5	3	5	4	5	3	5
Q8	2	4	2	4	2	5	1	5	2	5	2	5
Q9	3	5	3	5	2	5	2	5	3	5	2	5
Q10	3	1	3	1	3	1	2	1	3	1	2	1
Q11	4	5	3	5	3	5	3	5	3	5	3	5
Q12	1	4	1	5	1	5	2	5	2	5	1	5
Q13	1	5	3	5	3	5	3	5	3	5	3	5
Q14	1	5	1	5	1	5	1	5	1	5	1	5

Table #3: Response to the statement: "The goal of the spiritual life is to become like God."

Performance of Total Population

	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total number in population	**6**	**100**	**6**	**100**
Number who strongly disagreed	**1**	**16.5**	**0**	**0**
Number who disagreed	**1**	**16.5**	**0**	**0**
Number who were uncertain	**4**	**67**	**0**	**0**
Number who agreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who strongly agreed	**0**	**0**	**6**	**100**

Analysis of the statement: The goal of the spiritual life is to become like God."

At the conclusion of the project, 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement compared with 67% of the population that was initially uncertain of this reality and 16.5%, respectively, that initially disagreed and strongly disagreed at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and post-test results reflect a 33% increase on the part of the population that was uncertain whether or not the goal of the spiritual life is to become like God and an 83.5%, respectively, on those segments that disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement.

Results generated at the time of the pre-test and post-test lend themselves to the inference that when the pre-test was administered, none of the participants were able to skillfully articulate what the definition of the spiritual life is. On account of having participated in lecture and discussion sessions, participants were able to attain a clear understanding pertaining to the goal of the spiritual life.

Table #4: Response to the statement: "The Cycle of Spiritual Experience/Renewal is a valuable tool for assessing one's spiritual condition."

Performance of Total Population

	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total number in population	6	100	6	100
Number who strongly disagreed	0	0	0	0
Number who disagreed	0	0	0	0
Number who were uncertain	5	83	0	0
Number who agreed	1	17	0	0
Number who strongly agreed	0	0	6	100

Analysis of the statement : "The Cycle of Spiritual Experience /Renewal is a valuable tool for assessing one's spiritual condition."

At the conclusion of the project 100% of the participants agreed with the statement, compared with 83% of the population that was initially uncertain and 17% that initially disagreed at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and post-test results reflect a 17% increase of the segment of the population that was initially displayed uncertainty as to whether or not the Cycle of Spiritual Experience/Renewal is a valuable tool for assessing one's spiritual condition and an 83% increase on the part of the segment who initially disagreed with the statement.

Results generated at the pre-test and post-test lend themselves to the inference that when the pre-test was administered, none of the participants was familiar with the Cycle of Spiritual Experience/Renewal and therefore unaware that it could be employed as a valuable tool in assisting individuals to assess their spiritual development. On account of having participated in lecture and discussion sessions, participants gained an in-depth understanding as to how they might employ the Cycle to cultivate a deepening of their relationship with God.

Table #5: Response to the statement: "I am familiar with the practice of spiritual disciplines."

Performance of total population

	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST	
	No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Total number in population	**6**	**100**	**6**	**100**
Number who strongly disagreed	**6**	**100**	**0**	**0**
Number who disagreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**

Number who were uncertain	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who agreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who strongly agreed	**0**	**0**	**6**	**100**

Analysis of the statement, "I am familiar with the practice of spiritual disciplines.

At the conclusion of the study 100 % of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 100% that strongly disagreed at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and post-test results reflect a 100% increase of the population concerning the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Pre-test and post-test results lend themselves to the inference that when the pre-test was administered, none of the participants was knowledgeable as to how the Classical Spiritual Disciplines might be systematically applied to their lives, in order to cultivate a deepening of their relationship with God. Participants indicated that they were familiar with a few of the Disciplines, such as Bible study, meditation and prayer. They were however unaware as to how they might incorporate all of the Disciplines in their repertoire of behaviors, in order to engender spiritual growth leading to a deepening of their relationship with God. On account of having participated in lecture and discussions, participants gained insight as to how they might employ the Disciplines to deepen their walk with God.

Table #6: Response to the statement: "Spiritual disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God in order that He might transform us."

Performance of Total Population

	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total Number in population	**6**	**100**	**6**	**100**
Number who strongly disagreed	**1**	**16.5**	**0**	**0**
Number who disagreed	**1**	**16.5**	**0**	**0**
Number who were uncertain	**3**	**67**	**0**	**0**
Number who agreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who strongly agreed	**0**	**0**	**6**	**100**

Analysis of the statement, "Spiritual disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God in order that He might transform us.

At the conclusion of the study 100 % of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 67% of the population that was initially uncertain and 16.5% respectively that initially disagreed and strongly disagreed at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and post-test results reflect a 33% increase on the segment of the population that was initially uncertain as to whether or not spiritual disciplines enables us to place

ourselves before God, in order that He might transform us and an 83.5% increase on the segments of the population that initially disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement.

Pre-test and post-test results lend themselves to the inference that when the pre-test was administered none of the participants were aware of the fact that spiritual disciplines could be employed as a means whereby they submit themselves to God in candidacy for His transformation. On account of having participated in lecture sessions and discussions, participants acquired insight as to how the Disciplines might be employed a means for cultivating a deepened relationship with God.

Table #7: Response to the statement: "Bible study provides us with knowledge about the personality of God."

Performance of Total Population

	PRE-TEST		POST-Test	
	No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Total number in population	**6**	**100**	**6**	**100**
Number who strongly disagreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who disagreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who were uncertain	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who agreed	**4**	**67**	**0**	**0**
Number who strongly agreed	**2**	**33**	**6**	**100**

Analysis of the statement: "Bible study provides us with knowledge about the personality of God.

At the conclusion of the study 100% of the population strongly agreed with the statement, compared to 67% of the population that initially agreed and 33% that initially strongly agreed at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and post-test results reflect a 33% increase on the part of the population that initially agreed that Bible study provides us with knowledge concerning the personality of God and a 67% of those who initially strongly agreed.

Pre-test and post-test results lend themselves to the inference that approximately one third of the population was not fully convinced that Bible study provides us with information concerning the personality of God. Pre-test results indicate that approximately two thirds of the population agreed that Bible study provides us with information concerning the personality of God and one third strongly agreed. However, after participating in lecture and discussion sessions, the entire population strongly agreed that Bible study does indeed provide us with knowledge concerning the personality of God.

Table #8: Response to the statement: "I engage in Bible study daily."

Performance of Total Population

	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total number in population	**6**	**100**	**6**	**100**
Number who strongly disagreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who disagreed	**4**	**67**	**0**	**0**

Number who were uncertain	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who agreed	**1**	**16.5**	**3**	**50**
Number who strongly agreed	**1**	**16.5**	**3**	**50**

Analysis of the statement: "I engage in Bible study every day."

At the end of the study 50% of the population agreed with the statement that they daily engaged in Bible study and 50% strongly agreed, compared with 67% that initially agreed and 16.5%, respectively, that initially agreed and strongly disagreed at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and post-test results reflect a 17% increase on the part of the population that initially disagreed with the statement and a 23.5% increase, respectively, on the part of those individuals that initially agreed and strongly agreed.

Results generated at the time of the pre-test and post-test lend themselves to the inference that when the pre-test was administered 50% of the population did not engage in Bible study on a daily basis, even though they intuitively recognized that daily Bible study is indispensible to one's interior growth. However, on account of having participated in lecture and discussion sessions, participants gained a heightened awareness concerning the necessity of daily Bible study, as it pertains to generate the deepening of one's relationship with God.

Table #9: Response to the statement: "Prayer is essential to our search for God's design for us and the world."

Performance of Total Population.

	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total number in population	**6**	**100**	**6**	**100**
Number who strongly disagreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who disagreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who were uncertain	**3**	**50**	**0**	**0**
Number who agreed	**3**	**50**	**0**	**0**
Number who strongly agreed	**0**	**0**	**6**	**100**

Analysis of the statement: "Prayer is essential to our search for God's design for us and the world."

At the conclusion of the study 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 50% of the population that initially agreed and 50% that were uncertain at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and post-test results reflect a 50% increase on the part of the population that was initially uncertain as to whether or not prayer is essential to our search for God's design for us and the world.

Pre-test and post-test results lend themselves to the inference that at the time the pre-test was administered, 50% of the population was unsure about the purpose of prayer. Many

individuals viewed prayer as simply "talking" to God. On account of having participated in lecture and discussion groups, participants were able to gain a deeper understanding of the purpose of prayer and how it leads to a living relationship with God.

Table #10: Response to the statement, "I engage in prayer daily."

Performance of Total Population

	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total number in population	**6**	**100**	**6**	**100**
Number who strongly disagreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who disagreed	**5**	**87**	**0**	**0**
Number who were uncertain	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who agreed	**0**	**0**	**2**	**33**
Number who strongly agreed	**1**	**17**	**4**	**67**

Analysis of the statement: "I engage in prayer daily."

At the conclusion of the study 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 87% of the population that initially disagreed and 17% that initially strongly disagreed at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and post-test results reflect a 54% increase in awareness on the part of the population that initially disagreed that they engage in prayer on a daily basis and an 50% increase on the part of those who initially strongly disagreed with the statement.

Pre-test and post-test results lend themselves to the inference that when the pre-test was administered a little less than ninety per cent of the population acknowledged that they did not engage in prayer on a daily basis, while the remaining individuals strongly disagreed. On account of having participated in lecture and discussion sessions, the entire population gained a deeper understanding that the practice of prayer is indispensible to spiritual formation that leads to the deepening of one's relationship with God.

Table #11: Response to the statement: "The human body is an instrument of revelation and reconciliation."

Performance of Total Population

	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST	
	No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Total number in population	**6**	**100**	**6**	**100**
Number who strongly disagreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who disagreed	**4**	**67**	**0**	**0**
Number who were uncertain	**2**	**33**	**0**	**0**
Number who agreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who strongly agreed	**0**	**0**	**6**	**100**

Analysis of the statement: "The human body is an instrument of revelation and reconciliation."

At the conclusion of the 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 67% of the population that was initially uncertain and 33% that initially disagreed at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and post-test results reflect a 33% increase in awareness on the part of the population that was initially uncertain as to whether or not God designed the human body an instrument of revelation and reconciliation and a 67% increase on the part of those individuals that initially disagreed.

Pre-test and post-test results lend themselves to the inference that when the pre-test was administered, no one was absolutely certain as to whether or not the human body is both an instrument of revelation and reconciliation. After having participated in lecture and discussion sessions, participants arrived at the understanding that the human body is both an instrument of revelation and reconciliation.

Table #12: Response to the statement: "Spiritual Disciplines have no correlation with the human body.

Performance of Total Population

	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST	
	No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Total number in population	**6**	**100**	**6**	**100**
Number who strongly disagreed	**0**	**0**	**6**	**100**
Number who disagreed	**2**	**33**	**0**	**0**
Number who were uncertain	**4**	**67**	**0**	**0**

Number who agreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who strongly agreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**

Analysis of the statement: "Spiritual Disciplines have no correlation with the human body."

At the end of the study 100% of the participants strongly disagreed with the statement, compared with 67% of the population that was initially uncertain and 33% that initially disagreed at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and post-test results reflect a 33% increase in awareness on the part of the population that was initially uncertain as to whether or not spiritual disciplines have any correlation with the human body and a 67% increase on the part of those who initially strongly disagreed that there is any correlation between the human body and spiritual disciplines.

Pre-test and post-test results lend themselves to the inference that at the time the pre-test was administered, no one was absolutely certain that there is any correlation between the human body and the practice of spiritual disciplines. After having participated in lecture sessions and discussion groups, participants arrived at the heightened awareness that there is a definite correlation between the human body and the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Table #13: Response to the statement: "Faith is essential to the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Performance of Total Population

	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total number in population	6	100	6	100
Number who strongly disagreed	0	0	0	0
Number who disagreed	0	0	0	0
Number who were uncertain	5	87	0	0
Number who agreed	1	13	0	0
Number who strongly agreed	0	0	6	100

Analysis of the statement: "Faith is essential to the practice of spiritual disciplines."

At the conclusion of the study 100% of the participants agreed with the statement, compared with 87% of the population that was initially uncertain and 13 % that initially agreed at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and post-test results reflect a 13% increase on the part of the population that was initially uncertain as to whether or not faith is essential to the practice of spiritual disciplines and an 87% increase on the part of those who agreed with the statement.

Pre-test and post-test results lend themselves to the inference that at the time the pre-test was administered there was no absolute consensus on the part of the total population that

faith is indispensible to the practice of spiritual disciplines. After having participated in lecture sessions and discussion groups, participants were able to arrive at the consensus that faith is indispensible to the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Table #14: Response to the statement: "I engage in spiritual pursuits designed to increase my faith."

Performance of Total Population

	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total number in population	**6**	**100**	**6**	**100**
Number who strongly disagreed	**5**	**87**	**0**	**0**
Number who disagreed	**1**	**13**	**0**	**0**
Number who were uncertain	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who agreed	**0**	**0**	**1**	**13**
Number who strongly agreed	**0**	**0**	**5**	**87**

Analysis of the statement: "I engage in spiritual pursuits designed to increase my faith."

At the conclusion of the study 87% of participants strongly agreed with the study and 13% agreed, compared with 87% of the population that initially strongly disagreed and 33% that initially disagreed at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and post-test results reflect a 87% increase on the part of the population that initially strongly agreed that they engage in spiritual pursuits designed to increase their faith and a 13% increase on those who initially agreed.

Pre-test and post-test results lend themselves to the inference that after having participated in lecture sessions and discussion groups, the lion's share of the population became more purposeful in engaging in pursuits designed to increase their faith.

Table #15: Response to the statement: "Commitment is an essential ingredient in the exercise of spiritual disciplines."

Performance of Total Population

	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total number in population	**6**	**100**	**6**	**100**
Number who strongly disagreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who disagreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who were uncertain	**6**	**100**	**0**	**0**
Number who agreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who strongly agreed	**0**	**0**	**6**	**100**

Analysis of the statement: "Commitment is an essential ingredient in the practice of spiritual disciplines."

At the conclusion of the study 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared with the same percentage that was initially uncertain at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and post-test results reflect a 100% increase on the part of the entire population, since everyone was initially uncertain as to whether or not commitment is an essential ingredient in the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Pre-test and post-test results lend themselves to the inference that after having participated in lecture sessions and discussion groups, participants were able to arrive at the clear understanding that commitment is essential to the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Table #16: Response to the statement: "I am committed to the practice of spiritual disciplines."

Performance of Total Population

	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total number in population	**6**	**100**	**6**	**100**
Number who strongly disagreed	**6**	**100**	**0**	**0**
Number who disagreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who were uncertain	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who agreed	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Number who strongly agreed	**0**	**0**	**6**	**100**

Analysis of the statement: "I am committed to the practice of spiritual disciplines."

At the conclusion of the study 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 100% that were initially uncertain at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and post-test results reflect a 100% increase on the part of the entire population as it pertains to their commitment to the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Pre-test and post-test results lend themselves to the inference that after having participated in lecture sessions and discussion groups, participants developed the capacity to arrive at the understanding that the practice of spiritual disciplines play a indispensible role in enabling individuals to place themselves in candidacy to God's transformative power and experience a deepening of their relationship with Him.

JOURNAL ENTRIES

Each of the six participants submitted journal entries to the study which had their own unique points of view and were at times congruent with the points of view of other members of the group.

Participant identified as ID #001 was in agreement with other members of the study group indicated that, prayer is indispensible to spiritual formation and cultivating a deepened relationship with God. What was significant about this participant's journal entry is the fact that they are of the firm belief that a crucial aspect of prayer is the ability to listen to what God might be saying to us. This point is extremely significant, in lieu of the fact that far too many individuals present petitions to God in prayer, but fail to become attuned to what God might be saying to them in response to their prayer.

Participant identified as ID #002 was also in agreement with other members of the study group that, prayer is indispensible to spiritual formation and cultivating a deepened relationship with God. During the course of the study, this participant arrived at the understanding that the practice of spiritual disciplines is not a "fate" to which we must

The participant believes that spiritual growth is not an option in the life of a Christian, but a necessity.

What was different in this participant's journal entry was the fact that they placed a very important premium of the need to exercise faith, in order that one might mature spiritually. This participant stressed the important of not placing too high a premium on external things, because they have the potential of choking the word of God from taking root within our spirit.

This participant also places a high premium on the discipline of commitment which allows one to stay the course in difficult times and also the discipline of meditation, which affords us the opportunity to "go down into the recreating silences into the inner world of contemplation." This participant opines that, "When you look at how it was God who delivered them (Israel) out of His love and mercy, your soul should cry out, hallelujah! If He did it for them, then He can do it for me." Amen.

Participant identified as ID# 005, is someone confronted by serious medical challenges that have tested their faith commitment over the years. This participant is wrestling with the possibility of acquiring a spiritual coach, as discussed during the six-week session, but the issue of trust continues to color their attitude.

This participant was raised in the Catholic faith, but is now a Protestant. They concur with Participant ID #001 regarding the importance of "listening" to God while engaged in the act of prayer. They also indicated that, the fact many individuals prefer to go through a mediator, as is done during confession at their former faith congregation, in very much the same way as when the children of Israel requested that Moses speak to God on their behalf and not allow them to have to do so themselves.

This participant indicated in their journal that they were influenced by the poems of T.S. Elliot and was pleasantly surprised to discover that he was a Christian. They claim that in like manner as Jesus, Elliot's work spoke to people in ways that they can relate and that, spiritual coaches must be able to communicate truths to people in a way that they will understand.

The researcher found this participant's journal entries to be very insightful, because it was a reminder that, when teaching spiritual disciplines to others, the coach or mentor must be an effective communicator that is able to provide information to others that is relevant to their life situation.

Participant indentified as ID #006 concurs with points discussed during the six-week study leading to the conclusion that the practice of spiritual disciplines provide us with a "pathway" to God, whereby we submit ourselves to Him, in order that through grace He might transform us into the image and likeness of Jesus, the Christ.

Participant ID #006 shares the sentiment of Participant ID #001 that, practitioners of spiritual discipline must cultivate the capacity to listen to what God might be saying to us, since God speaks to us all the time. And it is by listening or meditating on aspects that we are fed through His word.

Participant ID #006 embraces the reality that we live in two realms of existence, the visible and the invisible. He alludes to Jeremiah 1:5, where God informs the ancient prophet: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you).[1] This reference points to the fact that the spirit of the ancient prophet existed in an invisible dimension before existing on the visible dimension.

---

[1] Jeremiah 1:5.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Commenting on the *Rules for recluses* instituted by Saint Benedict, founder of the Cistercian order of which he emerged as a durable link in a long chain of legendary spiritual leaders, Thomas Merton wrote: "Nothing is more necessary than to adore the living God." He however wrestled with the reality that while such a profound statement might appear to many individuals as a simple platitude; it is really an imperative for one's whole life.[1]

To aspirants in pursuit of mystical union with God engendered through the deepening of their relationship with their Creator, Saint Benedict's exhortation is far from being a simple platitude. In reality, it is a theological truth that is congruent with the sentiments of the writer of Ecclesiastes: "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the *whole* duty of man (Ecclesiastes 11:13b, emphasis added)[2]

The academic objective of the researcher's study at UTS consisted of designing a replicable model or template, capable of enhancing the spiritual awareness of members of my faith community through the practice of spiritual disciplines, whereby they avail themselves to the deepening of their relationship with God. The final distillate of the study is an amalgam of responses culled from pre-test and post-test responses to the project questionnaire, lecture sessions and discussion groups, individual journal entries and personal observations on the part of the researcher. Invaluable insights acquired during academic

---

[1] Thomas Merton, *A Year With Thomas Merton* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1989), 27.

[2] Ecclesiastes 11:13b.

sessions at UTS and peer sessions with my mentor during a five day retreat at Abbey Gethsemane in Trappist, Kentucky, the spiritual home of Thomas Merton, served as prisms through which the project was filtered and brought to life.

As I reflect on the six-week project conducted at my faith community, important insights were catalyzed during a collaborative venture with six enthusiastic possibility people with expanded horizons. By mutual consensus, only insights that were deemed to be important planks in the platform on which the practice of spiritual disciplines might be erected within the faith community are listed below.

THE OBJECTIVE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES IS GOD HIMSELF

The apostle John tells us, "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).[3] Any venture towards a deepened relationship with God must first begin with the consideration of the nature of God. While biblical evidence discloses various aspects of God's nature, grace undoubtedly takes center stage on the landscape of Christianity. Van A. Harvey in his book entitled, *A handbook of Theological Terms,* expounds that, grace is perhaps the most crucial concept in Christian theology, because it refers to the free and unmerited act through which God restores His estranged creatures to Himself.[4]

Expounding on Martin Luther's concept of grace, Harvey states that, grace for the religious leader is what God is. He opines that, it is God resolving to be for man, to be present to him despite his rebelliousness. He further claims that, grace is not a rebellious

---

[3] 1 John 4:10.

[4] Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1964), 108.

attitude that could be replaced by another one, such as wrath. According to Harvey, it is God acting out of his deepest being. His belief is congruent with Martin Luther and his Reformer colleagues that, God's turning to man is a free act and in no way merited.[5]

Writing on "prevenient grace" a term for which he is associated, John Wesley, the father of the Methodist movement wrote:

> All the 'drawings of the Father;' the desires after God which, if we yield to them, increase more and more; all that 'light' wherewith the son of God 'enlighteneth everyone that cometh into the world' [cf. John 1:9], showing every man 'to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God' [cf. Micah 6:8]; all the convictions which his spirit from time to time, works in every child of man-----although, it is true, the generality of men stifle them as soon as possible, and after a while forget, or at least deny, that ever they had them at all.[6]

It would appear that from Wesley's point of view, prevenient grace is the cornerstone on which human relationships with God is erected. It infers that God acted to draw humankind to Himself long before any of us even considered seeking Him. God sending His beloved son into the world to reclaim a fallen race back to Himself is the greatest demonstration of His grace towards humankind. In this vein, when we speak of deepening our relationships with God, we should be mindful that any urge on our part to seek God, is nothing more than our response to the initiatives of our heavenly Father that we sense in the deep aisles of our spirit. The acquisition of God is an imperative for one's whole life. Thomas Merton is credited with having said, "God became man, in order that man might become god." The practice of spiritual disciplines should therefore be undertaken with the primary intent of becoming acquainted with God's will for our lives. Since God is our

---

[5] Ibid., 109-110.

[6] John Wesley, "*The Scripture of Salvation,*" cited in *John Wesley,* edited by Albert C. Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 273.

Creator, He is intimately acquainted with His purpose for our lives. David stated that, all the days ordained for him were written in God's book even before any of them became a reality (Psalm 139:16)[7] Since God is able to situate us in the divine right place for which we were created, availing ourselves to Him through the practice of spiritual disciplines should not be done with preconceived agendas, but simply that of disposing ourselves to Him in candidacy for transformation. This sentiment is congruent with the words of the apostle Paul that, our spiritual habitat ought to be God Himself, because it is in God whom we live and move and have our beings fixed (Acts 17:28).[8] When we unpack Paul's sentiments, it boils down to the fact that, God ought to be the center of gravity of every believer's existence.

DISCIPLINES MUST BE PROGRAMMED INTO DAILY SCHEDULES

Reflecting on the life of Jesus, we note that His highest priority was that of daily spending time in communion with his heavenly Father. In the dizzying fast-paced schedules of our twenty-first century world, making time for God in our lives is congruent with the lifestyle of Jesus.

It is important to note that the researcher did not say that we ought to *find* time for God, but instead, we ought to *make* time for Him. In other words, our schedules should be arranged with God as the axis around which everything else revolves and this is accomplish this by programming spiritual disciplines into our daily routines. It is wishful thinking to embrace the illusion that confronted with competing loyalties, the practice would automatically occur without being shunted to the side, in order to accommodate seemingly important demands.

---

[7] Psalm 139:16.

[8] Acts 17:28.

Drawing on my retreat experience at Abbey Gethsemane, in Trappist, Kentucky, I was able to obtain firsthand glimpse into the daily Order to which monks submit themselves. I successfully struggled on more than one occasion to rouse myself out of bed to participate in Lauds beginning at 3:30 AM in the morning. I do not see this action as a heroic venture on my part, but simply another gesture to God that I quest for the deepest possible experience of Him and hopefully my rising at the early morning hour was indicative of my heart's desire. During my pursuit to "get" more of God while visiting the spiritual home of her favorite son, the late Thomas Merton, I was cognizant of his words: "God gives Himself to those who give themselves to Him."[9]

In whatever context life deposits us, we must become intentional in disengaging from routine activities, in order to create space in our lives for God. It is not uncommon for individuals involved in religious pursuits to become overwhelmed by the *opus*—the administrative work of the church, to the extent that they end up losing focus on the *reason* for their work. It is easy for spiritual leaders and lay people alike to mistake work for worship. As such, they become over preoccupied with work and neglect worship. By disengaging from work schedules and rituals we temporarily sever ties with things of time and sense that conspire to choke God out of our lives.

Before the children of Israel left the desert to inhabit the Promised Land, Moses recognized with foreboding that on account of their newly acquired fast-paced lifestyle, they would be tempted to forget God. He poignantly implored the people about to cross Jordan without him: "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose

---

[9] Thomas Merton, A Year With *Thomas Merton: Daily Meditations From His Journals* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1989), 69.

life…(Deuteronomy 30:19).[10] He exhorted them at an earlier point: "Take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor let them slip from your mind.[11]

Moses was cognizant of the reality that once the children of Israel departed the confines of the desolate desert where God spoke tenderly to them, they would fall prey to the complacent, pernicious illusions of self-sufficiency prevalent in the urban life of the fortified cities they were about to inhabit. Those of us who live in urban areas are intimately acquainted with the pressing demands of life that result in us being "busy," and fiercely compete to become the ruling aegis of our lives. It is therefore imperative that we daily reset our inner ethical and theological clocks and correct the error of our fallen priorities and recognize God as the Center of our lives and thereby create space in our lives for Him.

Disengaging from routine activities in order to spend time with God is in keeping with the Sabbath rest God enshrined in the Ten Commandments as one of the requirements of His people. While we are stipulated to set aside an entire day of Sabbath rest, disengaging at certain points from routine daily activities in order to spend time with God, is in keeping with the example of our Lord. It is the means whereby we daily replenish our depleted resources by obtaining succor and sustenance from God as we submit ourselves to Him through the practice of spiritual disciplines.

PARAMETERS FOR DISCIPLINES MUST BE TIME-BOUND

Drawing on insights gleaned from lecture and discussion sessions and literature provided by the researcher, participants arrived at the overwhelming consensus that,

---

[10] Deuteronomy 30:19.

[11] Deuteronomy 4:9.

parameters established in the practice of spiritual disciplines sought to be time-bound and not achievement-bound.

Individuals engaged in the practice of spiritual disciplines are invariably at different stages of spiritual maturity, as evidenced by the life histories of the participants engaged in the study. It goes without saying therefore, that some will possess a deeper understanding of the Christian faith than others. However, the practice of spiritual disciplines is not designed to present God with an impressive spiritual resume as a placation for some special favor or merit. The aim of spiritual disciplines is the acquisition of God Himself. This is congruent with the sentiments of Lynda L. Graybeal and Julia L. Roller in their Book entitled, *Connecting With God*, where we are reminded by the authors that, spiritual disciplines do nothing more than afford us the opportunity of placing ourselves before God. It is the media through which we approach God and the point at which the grace of God steps in and takes the offering of ourselves and creates out of it persons that embody the goodness of God.[12] In their insightful treatise, both authors drill down to the reality that, spiritual growth is wholly contingent on God's revelation and not personal expectations.

The fact that we invariably find ourselves at different stages of spiritual growth, we must refrain from comparing ourselves with others and being too hard on ourselves, because we might be of the misconception that we ought to be at a "higher level of spirituality." Since spiritual growth is contingent on God's revelation and not personal expectations, the practice of spiritual disciplines entails setting aside time on a daily basis for God, in order that we might submit ourselves to Him instead of being overly preoccupied with the "results" of our

---

[12] Lynda l. Graybeal and Julia L. Roller, *Connecting With God: A Spiritual Formation Guide* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2006), XII.

actions. It cannot be overemphasized that, our objective in the practice of spiritual disciplines must be God and not any self-ideations.

In lieu of the fact that the first order of business is that of creating space in our lives for God, instead of becoming preoccupied with results, the researcher is of the opinion that parameters established for spiritual disciplines ought to be time-bound and not achievement bound, because our achievements are never fully realized. It is a human tendency to adjust the goal posts of our expectations as we experience growth and maturity. By so doing, we never really feel as though we have maximized our potential. This motivation prompts us to expand our horizons to do better. Whether or not we view ourselves as underachievers or keep raising the bar of our expectations, growth in the spiritual arena is entirely contingent on God's grace. As such, we must refrain from affixing numerical ratings on our achievements in the arena of spiritual growth

DISCIPLINES SHOULD INCLUDE AN EDUCATION COMPONENT

The researcher found it quite surprising that before the initiation of the study none of the participants involved in the six-week project were acquainted with the full complement of the Classical Spiritual Disciplines, nor were they aware of the fact that they are the means whereby one might avail themselves to God, in order that they might experience a deepening of their relationship with Him. While they were acquainted with a few of the Disciplines, they were ignorant of the majority of them. This highlighted the fact that leaders and the congregation at-large need to be educated in the practice of spiritual disciplines.

As an educator and spiritual leader, the intervention highlighted the need to incorporate quality time in our schedules that is dedicated to education and re-education, in order that we might become more effective, teachers or healers. Creating time to educate

oneself oftentimes entails becoming familiar with new material. In the case of this project, it was the practice of spiritual disciplines. Sometimes however, it simply means re-learning things we think that we know, but really do not, in order that we might start doing them more effectively. It means revisiting the basic premises, in order to recalibrate our praxis with established practices. We are at time unable to attain important objectives, because we do not adhere to basic premises and in so doing we erect our actions on faulty assumptions. Dedicating time for reeducation is extremely important, because if the basic premises are not adhered to, we ultimately tend to lose relevance.

In addition to learning new material or re-learning things that one might not be doing efficiently, availability of resources is a very important aspect of the education component. For example, people need to become familiar with literature that will expand their spiritual horizons. As such, in addition to providing coaching, mentors serve an important role in providing access to spiritual literature, in instances where they serve to enhance spiritual formation.

At the end of the six-week study, the researcher presented each of six participants with a copy of Richard Foster's books entitled, *Celebration of Discipline* and *Prayer.* Each individual informed the researcher that, they experienced a broadening of their theological horizons after having had the opportunity to read both books and that both infused them with the impetus to acquire additional literature in the area of spirituality. One individual indicated that since the completion of the project, they have begun utilizing *Celebration of Disciplines* as a text in his Sunday school curriculum.

It also became apparent during the six-week study that, re-education entails engaging in critical thinking that encourages us to challenge thoughts and assumptions employed in the

shaping of our belief system and be willing to realign those thoughts and assumptions when they do not mesh with biblical truth. We must also be willing to examine cultural and social mores that shape our hermeneutic and ascertain whether our cultural and social prisms are congruent with biblical truth.

Several participants embraced beliefs that were bequeathed to them by parents and guardians, but they found it difficult at times to justify their beliefs, because they were not supported by biblical evidence. The researcher pointed out to certain individuals of the need to ensure that their belief system is always undergirded by biblical truth.

PRACTICE OF DISCIPLINES SHOULD PROVIDE FOR FEEDBACK

Pertaining to matters of the spirit, Paul reminds us that, we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror.[13] In the estimation of the apostle, we never really seem to acquire full illumination concerning our spiritual condition. As such, we are invariably in need the sage counseling of a skilled leader or mentor that will facilitate the crystallization of spiritual truths to become birthed within our spirit in ways that spur us towards growth and maturity.

Searching discussions with both my academic mentor at UTS and participants of the six-week study enabled the researcher to arrive at the conclusion that in the practice of spiritual disciplines one must remain open to the broadening of their perceptions of spiritual issues. When one is not open to feedback they ultimately become rigid in their thinking and rendered incapable of realigning their priorities. As such, we must all be receptive to feedback from mentors and coaches, in order to ascertain whether or not there is a more beneficial course of action available to us.

---

[13] I Corinthians 13:12a.

Individuals providing spiritual guidance to others possess the capacity to influence the lives of those in their charge in either a positive or negative way. As such, individuals providing guidance to others must be careful not to allow personal biases to color their judgment.

While feedback is essential in correcting faulty assumptions and strategies during the practice of spiritual disciplines, in order to generate feedback from individuals in their charge, coaches or leaders must create systems that are conducive to feedback. Recipients of coaching must be aware of the fact that they are encouraged to share their opinions even in instances when the opinions might be viewed as unconventional.

While it is important for leaders to create systems designed to foster feedback, it must flow in both directions of any hierarchical relationship, in order to promote a healthy climate. Leaders and learners must both be willing to be open to constructive feedback. While learners are the recipients of information imparted to them by leaders or mentors, these individuals are frequently encumbered with emotional blind spots that prevent them from embracing the viewpoint of someone in their charge. The inability of a leader to be open to someone else's perspective could result in barriers to communication being erected in the mind of the individual who are of the opinion that their point of view is valid, but not valued. While a leader or mentor might not agree with every point of view of someone under their charge, they must refrain from acting in ways that stifle or suppress feedback. The point of view of all parties in a hierarchical relationship must be affirmed.

During the six-week study there were instances where the researcher did not agree with every point of view of several participants. In approximately ninety nine percent of the instances, divergent opinions amounted to nothing more than minor nuances coloring our

hermeneutical perspective of some issue, rather than radical doctrinal differences. While there might not have been a meeting of the minds on all matters discussed, everyone respectfully agreed to disagree. This attitude of respect for each participant's contribution promoted a healthy climate for discussion and kept the lines of communication open.

The study revealed that, individuals in leadership positions must be careful not to develop messianic ideations and fall prey to the false premise that they know it all. When someone begins to perceive themselves as an "expert," they become predisposed to becoming blindsided by unexpected events, because they operate under the illusion that they are ultimately in control of every situation. Additionally, when individuals providing guidance to others begin to view themselves as "experts," they run the risk of becoming self-absorbed and by throwing caution to the wind, they begin to act presumptuous. As such, since those in leadership positions counsel people to take specific courses of action designed to improve their spiritual condition, they must likewise make themselves accessible to re-education, healing and self-renewal. It was the general consensus of the study group that the leaders or mentors must conduct themselves in a transparent manner to the followership, in order that their message might have integrity. They should never allow themselves to arrive at the point where they are perceived by the followership that they view themselves as infallible and not subject to no higher authority than themselves. Leaders must never disassociate themselves from their message. In other words, the message must not only be relevant for others, it must also be relevant for them. The message must be communal, since leaders must put themselves in the place of the crowd by integrating themselves in the message.

IN THE PRACTICE OF DISCIPLINES COMMUNICATION MUST BE CLEAR

One of the insights that crystallized during the six- week project is the need for individuals to serve as skilled diagnosticians possessing the ability to communicate clear and uncontaminated messages to those in their charge.

Employing a medical paradigm, it could be said that leaders are frequently involved in accessing or diagnosing ineffective strategies that might be hindering individuals in their charge from experiencing spiritually maturing as they should, in very much the same way that physicians are involved in diagnosing pathologies impacting the lives of patients in their charge from garnering optimum health. In both scenarios the need to effectively communicate the diagnosis is more important than simply diagnosing. Diagnosticians must be able to communicate a diagnosis, in order for it to be effective. In other words, they must be able to communicate the message of what they need the individual being diagnosed to know, in order that the individual might be able to do something to alleviate their condition.

It became evident to the researcher that many individuals at times become so overwhelmed by life-negating behavior patterns; so much so, that they fail to recognize the way in which they are behaving is impeding their spiritual growth. As such, it is extremely important that leaders be careful not foist their opinions on the diagnosed as to how they must respond to a message provided to them. Attempting to convince someone to change their behavior will not work unless the individual being diagnosed is capable of discerning how certain behaviors might be impeding their progress towards achieving wholeness.

In his unpublished book entitled, *A Manual For Spiritual Coaching,* professor Larry Grunden addresses the need for spiritual coaches to be professionally competent and

cognizant of another individual's perspective on life.[14] When one talks about perspective, one must take into consideration barriers that might prevent the diagnosed from recognizing the problem relayed to them by the diagnostician as an impediment to wholeness. As such, the diagnostician must be skillful in teasing out perceptions and barriers that impede responsive action on the part of the diagnosed, in order that they might recognize the problem as a barrier to spiritual growth. Potential barriers to spiritual growth fall into the realms of cultural, sociological and spiritual perceptions.

IN THE PRACTICE DISCIPLINES PEOPLE MUST BE EMPOWERED

Insights gleaned during the six-week study led the researcher to the conclusion that individuals being diagnosed must become involved in the diagnostic process, in order to bring about wholeness in their situation.

It became quite clear during discussion sessions that, individuals will not instinctively refrain from engaging in negative behaviors because some authority figure advised them to do so. When a diagnosis is made by someone in position of authority, the communication must first be accepted by the diagnosed before wholeness could ensue. The prescription presented to the diagnosed must be participatory. In other words, the diagnosed must first buy into the fact that the prescription presented to them is an effective corrective to the malady that besets them. The diagnosed must view the prescription as interactive and explore why the prescription is acceptable or unacceptable to them. It matters not how effective a prescription is viewed by the diagnostician, it will be of little value to the person receiving the prescription if they see no value in the corrective measures recommended.

---

[14] Larry Grunden, "*A Manual For Spiritual Coaching": Spiritual Coaching For Adults (Miamisburg, OH, n. p., 1998)*, 30.

Participants of the study intimated that they experienced a broadening of their theological horizons as a result of the information and resources that were made available to them by the researcher. Each indicated that, not only have they become better equipped to engage in the practice of spiritual disciplines culminating in the deepening of their relationship with God, but they now possess the requisite skills packet to instruct others in the practice of the said Disciplines.

The model is relevant to the urban congregation, because it provides fresh insights to believers pertaining to spiritual formation, which when incorporated into an individual's repertoire of behaviors will culminate in a deeper theological reality of God working within and transforming them into His image and likeness.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Beginning in the September 2008, a course of instruction dealing with the practice of spiritual disciplines will be integrated in the Sunday School curriculum at Berean Missionary Baptist Church. While the six-week project proved to be a resounding success in obtaining the desired objective, the researcher recognized that the curriculum needs to be subjected to minor pruning before embarking on future endeavors.

The first corrective that needs to be implemented in reshaping the curriculum pertains to the issue of journaling. The researcher observed that several participants demonstrated some reluctance in compiling and submitting journal entries on a timely basis. As such, securing requested journal entries took much prodding on the part of the researcher.

Journaling is a sensitive issue in many urban churches. Individuals who are college trained appear more open to documenting their perceptions and observations than individuals

who are not. The greater openness on the part of individuals with a college education might be due in large part to the experience of frequently being requested to document their feelings in classroom settings, seminars and workshops, etc. As such, this requirement poses no real dilemma for them. On the other hand, it was observed that individuals lacking college education demonstrated some difficulty in constructing coherent sentences and articulating their perceptions. In order to alleviate anxieties on the part of those individuals possessing limited writing skills, it might alleviate tensions on their part if the researcher engaged them in one-on-one sessions and subsequently document salient aspects of the discussion session.

In addition to the difficulty of retrieving journal entries from participants on a timely basis, a few of the statements presented in the pre-test and post-test questionnaire need to be reworded. The first is Statement #2 which reads: "The Cycle of Spiritual Experience/Renewal is a valuable tool for assessing one's spiritual condition." The way that the statement was phrased tended to generate a "yes" or "no" answer on the part of many participants. In order to generate a better response, it would be better to rephrase it to read, "Were you able to assess your spiritual condition by applying the Cycle of Spiritual Experience/Renewal to your life situation?"

The second statement in need of rewording is Statement #6, which reads: "I engage in Bible study daily." This statement also elicited a "yes" or "no" answer from a few participants. To obtain a better numerical rating, the statement should be rephrased to read: "I value Bible study in my daily life."

The third statement in need of rewording is Statement #8, which reads: "I engage in prayer daily." The response to this statement also elicited a "yes" or "no" response on the part of several participants. To obtain a more accurate numerical rating of an individual's

emotional state, the statement should be rephrased to read: "I value prayer in my daily living."

The fourth statement in need of rewording is statement # 10, which reads: "Spiritual disciplines have no correlation with the human body." To elicit a better response, the statement should read: "Do you think that spirituality is separable from the human body?"

The last statement in need of rewording is Statement #12, which reads: "I engage in spiritual pursuits designed to increase my faith." To elicit a better response, the statement should read: "I value engaging in spiritual pursuits designed to increase my faith."

In addition to the above considerations for future implementation of the model, the Cycle of Spiritual Renewal should also be utilized, since feedback provided by the six participants who participated in the pilot program indicated that it served as a valuable tool in enabling them to access their spiritual well-being.

Struggling on all possible fronts to construct a replicable model that might be employed by members of my faith community to experience a deepening of their relationship with God was an exciting and humbling experience that brought me joy that buoyed my spirit. Collaborating with a sage mentor and colleague in the person of professor Larry Grunden and Almighty God, I became the recipient of unexpected illumination unfolding within me and challenging me to commit myself to a discipline of presence to the Creator in Word, nature and my inner being. Visualizing new horizons is an epiphany that prompts me to echo Charles Wesley's anthem of becoming "lost in wonder, love, and praise"[15]as I continue my spirit ascent to mystical union with God.

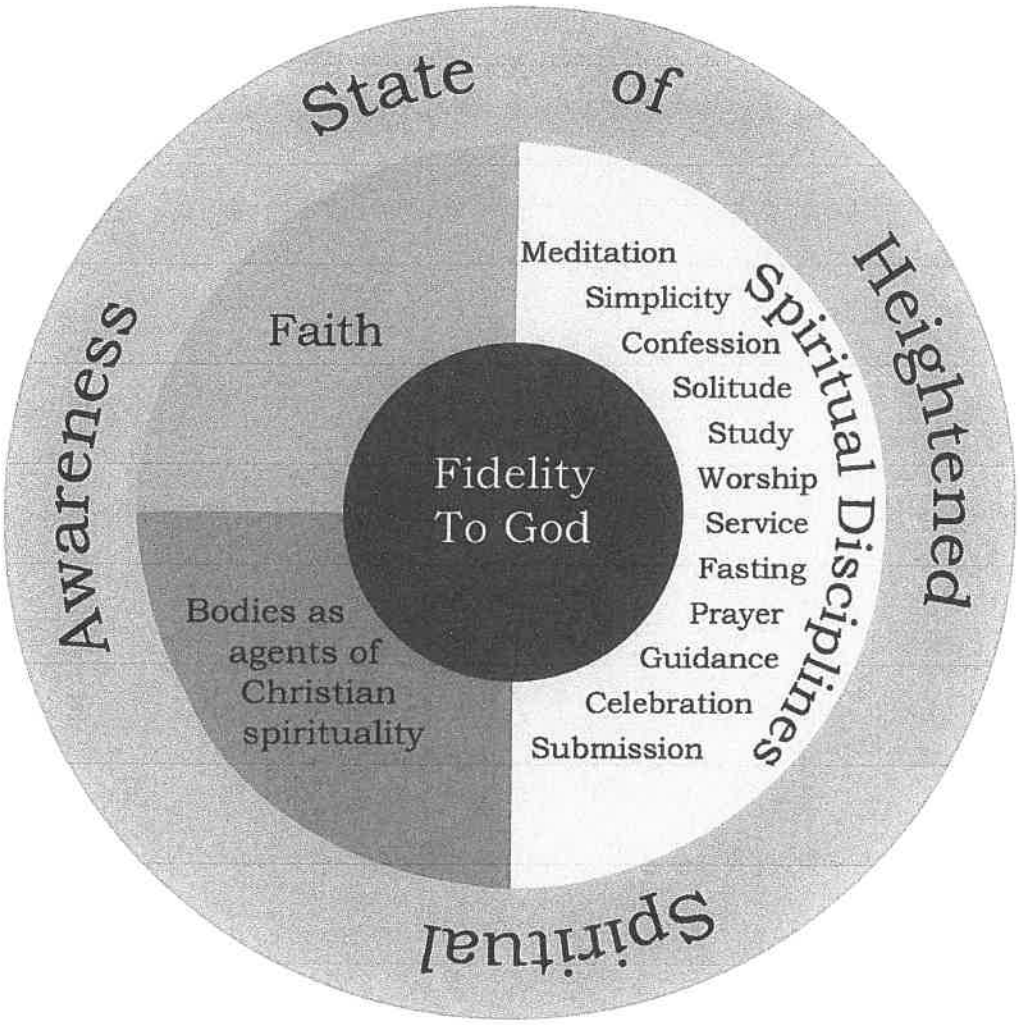
---

[15] Charles Wesley, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), no. 384.

APPENDIX A

Model of Project

Leary E. Bonnett's Model of Spiritual Awareness



APPENDIX B

Spiritual Growth Handout/Cycle of Spiritual Renewal

What Is Spiritual Growth?

A Study of Spiritual Theology, by Diogenes Allen
Presented by Larry Grunden

Questions which will be considered in this study:

1. What is the goal of the spiritual life?
2. What is the path to the accomplishment of the goal?
3. What motivates us to begin?
4. What helps us make progress in the spiritual life?
5. What hinders us from making progress?
6. How do we measure progress?
7. What are the fruits of the spirit?

Definitions:

1. The spiritual life is God's habitual presence
   It is what we do after turning to God which leads us to love one's neighbor.
2. Turning to God (conversion) is the beginning
3. Grace is God's activity whether we are making and effort or not
4. Justification is forgiveness, a gift of grace
5. Sanctification is becoming holy, living in grace;
   >sanctity is a characteristic of God; sanctification is becoming like God;
   God has chosen and call his people that they may become his people; this is like an adopted child who becomes a member of a family but also grows into becoming like the family;
   Sanctification is a gift & a goal; Christ is the greatest example

Stages

Stage 1, the active life, represented by Martha and members of a religious order
>Person takes practical advice on overcoming evil action; seeks to have flawed nature restored; one is renewed in order to love one's neighbor;
Stage 2, Indirect contemplative life; represented by Mary, sister of Martha; receptive to the physical world; discerning of god's presence in the entire created universe; *to see God in all things & all things in God;" "in him we live and move and have our very existence;"* ecology; three focuses=physical world, human nature, and the meaning of the Bible;
Stage 3, Direct love of God=one sees God face to face;

The Goal Of The Spiritual Life: To Become Like God

1. We are to grow in understanding of God because ***we become what we know.***
   a. Becoming indicates continuous movement toward
      i. Neverending increase in goodness & excellence, not stasis
   b. Sometimes we lose the capacity to know and obey God
      i. This is referred to as the Dark Night of the Soul in The Cloud of Unknowing
      ii. There is a phase of unknowing in the Cycle of Spiritual Renewal

2. The meaning of becoming like God in each stage
    a. Stage 1--The Active Life
        i. Life is never-ending growth and change
        ii. We develop spiritually as we interact with the Source of all good and desirable
    b. Stage 2--Indirect contemplation
        i. We respond with our minds, rather than our emotions
        ii. We appreciate unity in diversity, and diversity in unity in physical world & human nature

Questions:

1. Does becoming like God seem too grandiose of a goal? Are there others ways to say this?
2. What does never-ending growth mean, especially in relation to the stage of the spiritual life?
3. Have you ever experienced the Dark Night of the Soul?
4. How can you know you are at one with everything?
5. In what ways are you as an individual different from everything and everyone?

The Path To The Accomplishment Of The Goal: Conversion

1. Conversion means to turn around
    a. *The redirection of a personal life in conversion may be extremely sudden, so that he or she is very much aware of the change, or so gradual that it is almost imperceptible, even though a gradual change can result in a complete redirection (p. 38)*
        i. Insisting everyone have a conversion experience puts the emphasis on experience
    b. Conversion has a lot to do with community
        i. First Christians were Jews who were not converted from unbelieving to believing, but from a community that did not believe in Christ to one that did
        ii. People who are converted, become so as a rite of passage into the church
    c. Gentile converts came from paganism– from gods within the universe to God as the Source of the universe– God is complete without the universe
        i. Turn from secret cult rituals to open rituals, shared freely
        ii. *Rituals & incantations were not a substitute for moral & spiritual regeneration*
    d. Conversion from immorality to the demanding ethical standards taught by Jesus
        i. Even new Christians exhibited quarrelsome, immoral behavior
    e. From philosophies like stoic asceticism
        i. From self-mastery as an end in itself to self control in order to love neighbor
    f. From modern intellectualism to Spirituality
        i. Richard Swinburne, and Oxford philosopher of religion:
        My home, my school, my military service. . . and above all my university were all highly intellectual places, where I was exposed to all the achievements and current attitudes of the modern academic world. These attitudes were, it seemed to me, basically anti-Christian. The ethics of sophisticated intellectuals were very different from the ethics of traditional Christians.

Questions:

1. Do you think that some Christians today view the conversion experience as a test of whether you are an authentic Christian? Do you think it is viewed as the end rather than the beginning?
2. Can you pinpoint a specific time and location in which you were converted?
3. If you were raised in the church, what is conversion if it is gradual?
3. According to the Cycle of Spiritual Renewal, what is conversion?
4. Is applied learning the same thing as conversion?

Three Motivations: God's power, goodness, and wisdom

1. God is **attractive** for people seeking help
    a. From Internal & External Distress
        i. Broken lives or Natural disaster
2. God is **attractive** for people seeking aspiration to satisfy an inner hunger
    a. Jesus treated people who have failed, with mercy
        i. [God] *awakens us to the hunger we have for good that is greater than the good of this world, precisely because we have been created to find our goal in sharing in the life of God*
        ii. Augustine: *Our hearts are restless until they find rest in thee."*
3. God is **attractive** for people seeking understanding of self and world
    a. Desire to find meaning and a pattern to life
        i. Pattern of self in the world
    b. What holds people back is the secular view of life which is normative
        i. Common belief that morals & society do not need a religious foundation
        ii. Drive toward material progress
    c. Conversion is toward a spiritual perspective of life
        i. Integrates heart and mind
4. **Leo Tolstoy's Journey to God:** Seeking God is like learning to swim: some clothes must off before jumping in the water
    a. Impediments to spiritual swimming
        i. Giving up thinking that things of the world provide complete & lasting satisfaction
        ii. Giving up thinking that one can find God through pure reason
    b. *Without* awareness that something is missing without God, search is not authentic
        i. Tolstoy felt orphaned: *from the force of former habits,* [I] *addressed myself to one in prayer, Him whom I sought, however, I did not find*
        ii. He continued his search based on reason, but he concluded that the conception of God is not God. *Conception is what goes on within myself.*
5. Tolstoy said that he lived, (realized life), when he believed in God
    a. Belief meant revival for his life
        i. *A voice seemed to cry within me, 'This is He, He without whom there is no life. To know God and to live are one. God is life.'*
    b. On the other hand, to forget God meant that he was discouraged & felt that he had died.
        i. *I do not live when I lose faith in the existence of a God.*
    c. Three conclusions
        i. God seeks us out first; God exists regardless of our reason; faith is anchored in grace
        ii. We consciously interact with God; We interact because of our realized need for the transformation of our lives
        iii. We experience the effects of Divine life in our lives; effects are our religious feelings and desire to have our lives conform to God
    d. A formula created from Tolstoy's process
        i. Conscious need for God--beginning of search
        ii. Barriers to belief--puts the seeker in a quandary
        iii. Removal of barriers--because of a greater understanding of Christianity
        iv. Go beyond understanding to prayer
        v. Pattern of oscillation--between conviction and certainty
        vi. Increased clarity--brings stability that can weather storms

5. **T.S. Eliot's Journey to God:** focuses more on invisible body of believers, the church
    a. He knew the devastation of WWI & breakdown of national idealisms: disillusionment
        i. Personal religious experiences must be tied to history and doctrine
        ii. Individual experience of God cannot stand alone
        iii. Rejection of every hope other than transformative belief-no joy, only transformation
    b. He was aware that we cannot save ourselves
        i. Healing comes from taking responsibility for our own condition
        ii. Through repentance we connect with the past and gain a future--world is restored to us as God's world.
6. **Simone Weil's Journey to God:**
    a. Her first contact with Catholicism was after ill health & a year of factory work--
    Had frequent headaches & was studying the nature of affliction--3 significant experiences
        i. She took her parents to a small fishing town in Portugal to recuperate–
        She observed a religious procession there; the "heart-rending sadness of the hymns" made her aware that Xity was the religion of the poor and wretched
        ii. When visiting the church in Assisi where St. Francis prayed, she wrote: *something stronger than I was compelled me for the first time in my life to go down on my knees.* She described it as pure love
        iii. While at the abbey church of Solesmes, she simultaneously experienced a splitting headache and pure & perfect joy in the chants & words of the service; Xity is a force that elevates one in the midst of suffering; During the reading of a George Herbert poem "Love" *Christ himself came down and took possession of me.* The poem is about Christ sacrificing himself & offering his body as food for wretched.
    b. She never thought of the possibility of being directly contacted by the Divine
        i. She did not regard her mystical experience as the focus of her spirituality
        ii. The mystical experience at the intersection of wretchedness & love gives understanding to doctrines (rational beliefs)
        iii. Doctrines then shed light on self-regard, personal relations, society, world, suffering, war, work, and beauty. *If I light an electric torch at night, I don't judge its power by looking at the bulb, but by seeing how many objects it lights up*
        iv. Spiritual basis for human dignity--human beings are ends rather than means--
        When loved with a pure love there is no need for consolation or gain--"*It is a supernatural love that nourishes us through all the kinds of loves human beings are capable of: love of neighbor, love of the beauty of the world, love of religious ceremonies, and the love found in friendship.*"

Questions:

1. When are people most likely to experience a need to seek help from distress?
2. When are people most likely to experience an inner hunger?
3. When are people most likely to experience a need to learn about self and the world?
4. What phase in the Cycle of Spiritual Renewal is Tolstoy's spirituality related to the most?
5. What phase in the Cycle of Spiritual Renewal is T.S. Eliot's spirituality related to the most?
6. What phase in the Cycle of Spiritual Renewal is Weil's spirituality related to the most?
7. Do we think about God before we experience God;or experience God before we think about God?
8. What about the worship service, or what part in the worship service brings you closest to God?
9. How does your connection with God affect you: through feelings, through acts of love, through a desire to do something differently, through relief due to certainty, through awareness of self and the world, through engaging in the work of change, other_____?

What Helps Us Make Progress: spiritual disciplines & practices

Goal of Progress: freedom from inner turbulence--
this does not mean without feelings & passion, or being unmoved
This necessitates us knowing the 8 "basic things" with which humans must deal: food & drink, sexual desires, material goods, the need to compare ourselves to others, resentment, failure, success, and self-centeredness.

Ascetical Theology as a theology of progress: This is a way to move one toward the goal
"The branch of theology devoted to specifying the major hindrances to Christian love and the practices to overcome them is called ascetical theology" (p. 64). "The term 'ascetical' comes from the Greek ascesis, or discipline. St. Paul described the Christian life as a race to be run, requiring training or discipline if it is to be run well" (p.67).

1. Activities of ascetical practice: prayer & meditation, fasting, reading, almsgiving, vigils
   a. These help us gain sufficient mastery over ourselves
   b. These bring the self into focus
2. Attention is important to mastery and focus
   a. To focus & desire on the good that God seeks to give us (purity of heart)
      i.These gifts are: holiness, love, peace, joy, discernment, union with God
   b. To focus on divine things helps us be more like God
      i.Attention is the only faculty of the soul that gives access to God--S. Weil
   c. In a vigil one focuses attention on God in the face of competing desires
      i.This happens through meditation, prayer, and self-examination
   d. Hunger of fasting, toil of work, and silence in solitude=habitual reminders of God
      i.This leads to the spiritual value of God's presence
3. Progress in *the active life* is seen in the positive effects from habits of devotion
   a. In our minds God is our opponent
      i.God, we think, makes us do something we do not want to do
   b. Sooner or later we will gladly relinquish what we once did
      i.Many things we feared, we do gladly
   c. From rudeness to mindfulness
      i.Rudeness means acting without knowing the reasons for one's actions
      ii.Automation, conformity, inflexibility of holding to one's beliefs
   d. Isolation to solitude
      i.Solitude is an opportunity for undivided attention
      ii.Solitude enables one to detach from social norms
      iii.Makes us aware of the Christian community, throughout the ages
   e. Relief from anger
      i.Process: read scripture aloud, meditate on it, pray about what has arisen in one's heart and mind, contemplate (rest silently with God), express gratitude
   f. We are delivered from evil through coming in contact with Divine purity--S. Weil
      i.Makes us grateful for this benefit & culminates in love for neighbor
   g. From fear to love
      i.From a 'stony' heart to hearts that yield God's love
      Then let wrath remove; Love will do the deed:
      for with love stony hearts will bleed.--George Herbert
   h. From perception of God's wrath to perception of God's love
      i.God does not reject us because of our rejection of God--God turns it into revelation which shows the magnitude of God's love

i. development of integrity and discernment
    i. Integrity = the human nature is restored to the condition God intended
    ii. Discernment = the ability to assess our spiritual condition

What Hinders Us From Making Progress: laziness, judging the gospel in terms of reward & punishment, shallow roots.

1. People often do not find the treasure in their hearts, because it requires "earnest effort
    a. Their attention is on "nearby things"
        i. Many Bible passages tell us to awaken and be attentive
2. People stop attending worship when something goes wrong in their lives
    a. In the parable of the sower their seed quickly germinates, but wilts in the heat
        i. Shallow roots

Progress *In The Contemplative Life* (stages two and three)

All things are perceived as in relation to God & God is known through them.

1. Freedom from inflated self-importance and self-concern
    a. One can begin to see self as one among many
        i. Awareness that egocentricity cuts one off from God's healing reality
        ii. . . *.the world's goodness, its fascinating splendor, begins to reveal itself as the object of a perfect love--God's* (p. 102)
2. Suspending one's thought--judgement
    a. Emptying self in order to be receptive
        i. Desire to know truth, regardless of one's taste
3. Examine performance without seeking excuses
    a. It is necessary to look at one's faults in order to improve
        i. Faults in academic sense: one is not making contact with what one is studying
4. Attention to study, people, situations, one's own attention & motives--
    a. Learning from mistakes & the holy things of prayer, meditation, and contemplation
        i. *"Attention is not muscular effort--such as contracting your brow, holding your breath, or stiffening your muscles. It is a matter of interest, desire, wanting to know. This usually develops as we start to find learning pleasurable. Similarly, as we read, pray, and listen to scripture attentively, we increase in our desire to change the kind of person we are, we come to regret our failures, we wish to become more loving toward others, and we begin to long for God."*
5. Responding to what God does as creator
    a. God has loving intentions toward us seen through doctrines
        i. We grow to love doctrines-- they tell us where we are in relation to God
        ii. Reflection increases our love for God-- As our love increases, the work of God becomes active through us

Questions:

1. What is the purpose of spiritual focus & discipline? What would happen without these?
2. How does paying attention connect one with self, God, and neighbor? Does this cause growth?
3. What is the difference between having a reason for every action & reasonableness in acting?

4. What is the benefit of being habitually reminded of God?
5. Gives some examples of living according to a reward & punishment type of believing?
6. Egocentricity means living from human excuses. Why is it difficult to give this up?
7. What does the teachings of the incarnation or death and resurrection tells us about ourselves?
8. Is God restoring you to wholeness? What is being pulled together in your life?

Contemplation: a way to increase our knowledge & love of God

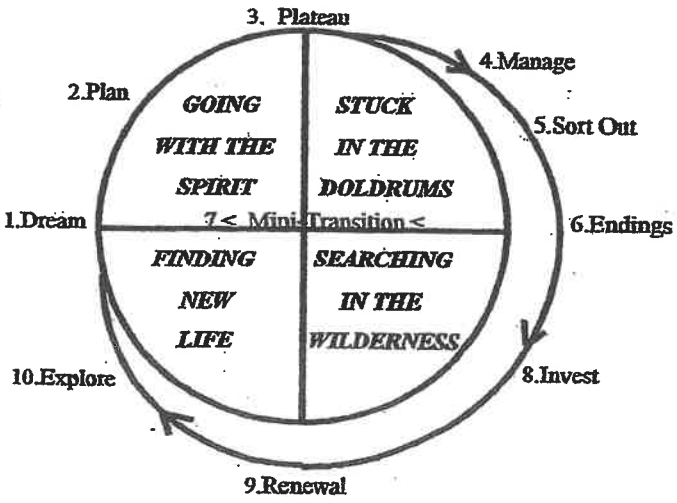
A. The Book of Nature
   1. Science is the study of the universe that exists
      a. It cannot answer the following questions
         i. *Why do we have a universe at all?*
            Why is the universe the way it is, rather than something else?
      b. Science cannot prove God's existence from nature
         i. Proving God's existence & contemplation of nature are not the same
   2. Beginning point: purity of heart
      a. The desire for God for God's own sake
         i. Our desires are shaped by this so that God becomes our treasure
      b. God's economy (household management)
         i. We learn about God's gift as we live in God's household
         ii. We gain knowledge of the world's order, harmony, and beauty=God's glory
      c. Through faith we see the world as good
         i. Mature faith is undistorted by our passions
   3. Contemplation of nature & human nature as a way to increase knowledge & love of God
      a. In the Exodus drama, Moses was acquainted with both
         i. Moses learned that *the whole world has its origin in God.*
      b. Creation is a school, a training ground where we learn to know God
         i. By sight of visible things the mind is led to contemplation of invisible things: when seeing a plant remember the Creator, grass: human nature (scriptural)
         ii. When we gain knowledge of the inner workings of nature through science, we marvel all the more at God's creation (Basil of Caesarea)
         iii. Seven properties of creatures on which to meditate: their origin, magnitude, multitude, beauty, fullness, activity, and order (Bonaventure)
         iv. Praise God for death: through it we recognize our creatureliness & that we are God's creatures (St. Francis)
         v. We seek the truth, as Christ sought truth, about things related to our own mortality: injury, accident, disease, aging, death
   4. Looking inward at our own human nature
      a. The deceptive part: we are like the two thieves beside Jesus
         i. Deception: that we our own
         ii. The more we are conscious of belonging to God, the more we meet God in our lives
      b. The things that we think distinguish us from each other are not essential
         i. Example of Diogenes Allen not liking a colleague-*thank God I'm not like him*
         ii. When he realized he was essentially like him, disdain left & felt a deep bond
      c. Occasionally we escape our egocentricity & perceive ourselves as we really are
         i. *Free of distorting effect of our wishes, interests, fears, and self-importance*
         ii. These are moments of grace

5. Technology, work, and human skill
    a. Technological improvement--part of restoration from the Fall (Hugh of St. Victor)
        i. This renewal is made possible by Christ-in Christ there is a new creation
    b. Work is connected to the productive work of God (St. Basil)
        i. This mirrors the creativity of God & show industrious intelligence
        ii. Monastic life led has to improvement of farming
        iii. Quest for theoretical, practical, mechanical knowledge leads us to know God
        iv. Merchants & craftsmen could think of themselves as monks in the world
    c. Christians in vocations are priests mediating Christ to others (Luther)
        i. Expansion of the spiritual value of crafts to spiritual value of vocation
        ii. When work is simply the application of brute force by unskilled workers, the workers themselves are brutalized by labor that gives no satisfaction, no dignity, and no practical knowledge of the principles of nature. Work becomes solely a way to make money, deadening the rest of life (S. Weil)

B. The Book of Scripture--We gain knowledge of God through prayerful reading of scripture
    1. Reading with the intention of hearing
        a. Read so that we can act on what we hear
            i. Reading scripture alone will not change us; responding to it will
        b. Fourfold meaning of scripture: Literal-historical, allegorical, moral, mystical
            i. Historical: can be understood without actually believing it
            we are to live in accordance with God's commandments-litteral
            recorded in the past as in Galatians 4: 22-23
            ii. Allegory: Galatians 4: 24-25--Paul turns facts into allegory--litteral text is used to convey hidden meanings
            Past is understood in a new way at a later time
            Strives to show unity of Old & New Testaments by discovering *points of correspondence between the Hebrew and Christian scriptures*--interprets an event or person in O.T. as a type of foreshadowing of Christ, another event, or person--I Cor. 10: 1-11--God-always the same
            Meaning beyond that recognized by its authors--what was in the older event comes to light when Christ becomes known
            iii. Moral: Practical--something spiritual is available to unbelievers
            Theoretical--not all meaning can be understood by unbelievers
            Virtuous living is necessary in order to become contemplative
            iv. Mystical: Conveys ultimate destiny--Jerusalem above (Gal. 4:26)
            Gives guidance on the spiritual journey
            Moses experienced a mysterious illumination by God throughout his life; *Thus Moses, even though he lived before Christ, is portrayed as having achieved what all Christians aspire to achieve: a life that forever increases in virtue through following God. Moses shows what perfection is: never-ending growth in knowledge and love because one is forever following God into the unbounded life of God.*

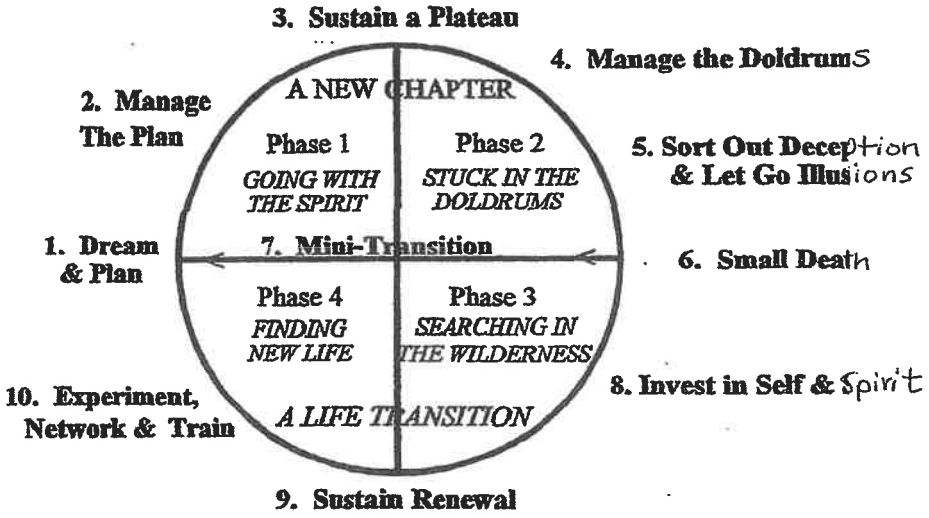
v. *Jerusalem can be taken in four senses; <u>historically</u>, as the city of the Jews; <u>allegorically</u>, as the Church of Christ; <u>analogically</u>, as the heavenly city of God "which is the mother of us all"; <u>topologically</u>, as the soul of man, which is frequently subject to praise or blame from the Lord under this title.*

CYCLE OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE/RENEWAL



Adapted from training materials produced by
The Hudson Institute, Santa Barbara, CA

TEN SKILLS
FOR GROWING IN
THE CYCLE OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL



Adapted from training materials produced by
The Hudson Institute, Santa Barbara, CA

APPENDIX C

PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST QUESTIONAIRE

RESEARCH QUESTIONAIRE

Circle the number that you feel provides a numerical rating to your response:

Strongly Agree = 5. Agree = 4. Uncertain = 3. Disagree = 2. Strongly Disagree = 1.

1. The goal of the spiritual life is to become like God (definition).

   (5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

2. The Cycle of Spiritual Experience/Renewal is a valuable tool for assessing one's spiritual condition.

   (5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

3. I am familiar with the practice of spiritual disciplines.

   (5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

4. Spiritual disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God, in order that He might transform us.

   (5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

5. Bible study provides us with knowledge about the personality of God.

   (5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

6. I engage in Bible study daily.

   (5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

7. Prayer is essential to our search for God's design for us and the world.

   (5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

8. I engage in prayer daily.

(5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

9. The human body is an instrument of revelation and reconciliation.

(5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

10. Spiritual disciplines have no correlation with the human body.

(5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

11. Faith is essential to the practice of spiritual disciplines.

(5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

12. I engage in spiritual pursuits designed to increase my faith.

(5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

13. Commitment is an essential ingredient in the exercise of spiritual disciplines.

(5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

14. I am committed to the practice of spiritual disciplines.

(5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

APPENDIX D

BIBLE STUDY AND SPIRITUALITY

Bible Study and Spirituality

Session #2

Christians share the consensus that the Holy Bible is the inspired word of God and the medium through which the Divine reveals His personality to humankind and His purpose for the created universe. Therefore, in order to become intimately acquainted with the mind of God, the source of information to which we look, is divinely inspired Scripture. The Psalmist questions: "How can a young man keep his way pure?" He responds to his own question: "By guarding it according to thy word." He further adds: "I have laid up thy word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:9, 11). In Christendom the Bible is the "authorized" source of information about God and His plan in His written word.

The Bible teaches that the purpose of spiritual disciplines is the total transformation of the person. They aim at replacing old death-generating habits with new life-giving ones. These insights are most emphasized in the Discipline of study. Paul states: "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).[16] The apostle contends that our transformation as Christians is contingent on whether or not our minds are engaged in an ongoing process of renewal in light of Christ. Our minds are deeply spiritual and their development must be a spiritual discipline. He states at another juncture: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever is true, whatsoever is just, whatsoever is pure, whatsoever is honorable, whatsoever is lovely, whatsoever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise,

---

[16] Romans 12:2.

think about these things" (Philippians 4:8).[17] A learned exegete of the highest order, the scholar exhorts Timothy: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman who need not be ashamed, rightfully dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).[18] Since the principal task of study is to engender perception into the realm of a given situation, the study of God's word equips Christians with insight into what He is communicating to the world through His inspired word, the Holy Bible.

Historical data lends credence to the fact that the human mind tends to conform to the order upon which it concentrates. The writer of Proverbs tells us: "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he" (Proverbs 23:7).[19] In other words, the human mind is shaped by the mental diet on which it feeds. This is the reason that down through the ages God's people have been exhorted by His emissaries to ensure that they ingest the kind of spiritual diet that will bend their minds in the direction of the Creator. For example, while on their way to inherit the Promised Land, the children of Israel were instructed by the prophet Moses to write God's laws on their gates and doorposts and to bind them on their wrists so that "they shall be as frontlets between your eyes" (Deuteronomy 11:18). Echoing the sentiments of Moses, the children were also exhorted by Joshua, younger brother and successor of Moses:

> This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success (Joshua 1:8).[20]

---

[17] Philippians 4:8.

[18] 2 Timothy 2:15.

[19] Proverbs 23:7.

[20] Joshua 1:8.

God wanted to make absolutely sure that through the discipline of study, the minds of his people would be molded by the instruction that became integrated in their consciousness, as they struggled to make Him the focus of their thought life. Jonathan Edwards, arguably the greatest intellect America has produced to date, contended while apparently referring to Christians, that the basic goal of any mind is to work toward "the consistency and agreement of our ides with the ideas of God."[21]

In our postmodern world, we are continually being bombarded by enticing stimuli from electronic and printed media and numerous other sources. The competing agents vying to lay claim to our attention is at times so overwhelming that, it has become a titanic struggle in maintaining sovereignty over our thought life. As such, it is important to remember that our minds ultimately conform to things on which we concentrate and that, the counteroffensive by which Christians insulate themselves from falling prey to intoxicating elements designed to capture their minds, is through the robust study of God's word.

Before proficiency could be attained in the practice of any discipline, we must first demonstrate the highest possible level of commitment. A prize fighter or Olympic athlete could never attain championship caliber unless they first struggle with every nerve and sinew to approximate the highest possible level of commitment to their craft. The very same holds true for the children of God as it pertains to Bible study. As such, there are iterative rights of passages that need to be negotiated before success becomes a possibility.

---

[21] James Emery White, *A Mind for God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 74.

The objective of commitment entails staying the course even when we experience emotional low points and feel like throwing in the proverbial towel and giving up the fight. Jesus reminded his followers: "In this life you will suffer tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).[22] When we recognize that ultimately we are victors through Christ, we become energized to continue studying God's word, thereby affording Him the opportunity to impact our minds and shape us into the image and likeness of His Son.

In addition to commitment, the study of God word requires repetition. Educators report that repetition channels the mind in specific directions and in so doing, things that are being repeated take root in our subconscious and become part of our thought pattern.

Richard Foster argues that, many forms of spirituality emphasize the regular rehearsal of the deeds of God. He claims that, rehearsal is also the central rationale behind the discipline of psychocybernetics, which trains individuals to repeat certain affirmations regularly (for example, "I love myself unconditionally"). Foster opines that, it is not important that the person believe what they are repeating, the important thing is that the affirmation be repeated in order to reverberate throughout their being. The inner mind is thus trained and will eventually respond by modifying behavior to conform to the affirmation.[23]

In his book entitled, *Wasting Time With God,* Klaus Issler concurs with the sentiments of Foster, stating that, repetition plays a key role in the study of sacred Scripture. He states that, regular repetition of God's thoughts is a way to focus our

---

[22] John 16:33.

[23] Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978), 65.

attention on the things of God. Meditation involves both internal and spoken 'muttering' (Heb. *Hagut 'a muttering*). Note the parallelism in Psalm 19:14: 'May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight'" (Psalm 19:14).[24]

Issler further states that, "The art of meditation—discerning the significance of the Word for the contemporary believer—is the art of formative reading."[25]

In his book entitled, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture,* Peter Toon contends that formative reading is an adaptation of "a modern form of Hebrew meditation." He contends that, it is to learn to read the sacred text slowly, prayerfully, and formatively—and preferably to read aloud. He further states that, it is done in such a way that allows the text to form us, to let God be in charge, and thus allow the Inspirer of Scripture to become for us its Illuminator so that its content (a little at a time) enters our souls"[26]

Sharing Toon's sentiments, J.P. Moreland explains that, in devotional reading one reads quietly, slowly, and with a sense of spiritual attentiveness and openness to God. He contends that, the goal of devotional reading is not so much gathering new information or mastering content, though that may indeed happen.

---

[24] Klaus Issler, *Wasting Time With God: A Christian Spirituality Of Friendship With God* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 32.

[25] Ibid., 32.

[26] Peter Toon, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Press, 1993), 74.

The primary goal is that of deepening and nourishing the soul by entering into the passage and allowing it to be assimilated into one's personality."[27]

Another important rung in the discipline of study is the act of concentration. While the mind might be repeatedly brought to a certain subject matter, when the practitioner concentrates on what is being studied, learning is enhanced.[28] While the human mind is bombarded by thousands of stimuli on a daily basis, only those things on which we concentrate is deposited in our memory banks. Therefore, by concentrating on God's word during study, we enhance our learning potential.

The next aspect in the disciple of study is that of comprehension.[29] While we might successfully navigate the three previous steps, if we fail to comprehend the subject matter being read, we will be engaging in an exercise of futility. This truth is evidenced in the report of the Ethiopian eunuch depicted in the Book of Acts. The report informs us that the African leader was on his way back to his native Ethiopia from Jerusalem after having attended Passover celebrations as was customary among Jews. He reclined in his chariot reading a passage from the Book of Isaiah. Unfortunately he did not possess the exegetical skills to comprehend what he was reading. The Holy Spirit translated the evangelist Philip, to the desert scene where he unlocked the mysteries of the text for the powerful executive of Candance, queen of Ethiopia. After acquiring illumination into the text and what the implications were for his personal salvation, the ebony-hued leader

---

[27] J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 164.

[28] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline,* 65.

[29] Ibid., 65.

surrendered his life to the authority of Jesus, the Christ and requested that Philip immediately baptize him (Acts 8:26-39).[30] Many scholars share the consensus that the Church in Africa was birthed by the Christian doctrine of Jesus and that the first emissary to transport it to the Dark Continent was the Ethiopian eunuch.

Comprehension is an indispensible component in the learning process because it enables us to acquire knowledge of the truth of God's word. The Bible tells us that knowledge of the truth will set us free (John 8:32).[31] Knowledge of the truth empowers Christians to engage in the act of critical discernment, in order to ensure that any decision they settle on is congruent with the word of God.

The final rung on the disciplinary ladder of study is reflection.[32]When we reflect of things that we study, we tend to sift out elements that are unimportant from ones that are important. In other words, reflection enables us to ascertain elements of study that are significant from those that are insignificant. [33]Reflecting on aspects of God's word that are important engenders spiritual formation. The Psalmist declared: "Thy word have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against thee (Psalm 119:11).[34] By reflecting or ruminating on God's word, the Holy Spirit collaborates with our efforts by enabling us to discern reality from God's perspective. Scripture informs us: "The Holy Spirit, whom the

---

[30] Acts 8: 26-39.

[31] John 8:32.

[32] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline,* 66.

[33] Ibid., 66.

[34] Psalm 119:11.

Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:26).[35]

Even though we might be vigilant in attempting to do everything possible to ensure that we cultivate effective study habits whereby we approximate the fullest possible understanding of what we are reading, we need to be mindful of the fact that, the primary objective for studying God's word is to be transformed by what we read. Since Christians believe that the Holy Spirit provides illumination on the subject matter being read, in order to experience transformation, it is essential that our response to illumination be the act of obedience. God's commandments will have absolutely no transformative effect on our lives if we simply view them as points of inspiration and refuse to respond to the demands they exact from us. Being obedient to God's commandments is the process whereby we align ourselves with His reality.

---

[35] John14:26.

APPENDIX E

Prayer and Spirituality

Prayer and Spirituality

Session #3

In His book entitled, *Celebration Of Discipline*, Richard J. Foster argues that, of all the spiritual disciplines prayer is the most central, because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father.[36] The high priority Foster places on prayer is congruent with that of Jesus: "And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1).[37]

Jesus never encouraged his followers to do anything that he was not prepared to do himself. Pertaining to the discipline of prayer, he always set the example for others to follow. This truth is revealed in Luke's gospel where prayer is one of the beloved physician's central themes. Luke reports that, Jesus prayed at significant moments in his life, such as at the occasion of his baptism: "Jesus also had been baptized and was praying" (Luke 3:21).[38] Before settling on the final choice on his twelve disciples, "He went out into the hills to pray. And when it was day, he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles" (Luke 6:12-13).[39] Jesus additionally displayed the high priority he accorded to solitude: "He would withdraw to a place and pray" (Luke 5:16).[40]

---

[36] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline,* 33.

[37] Luke 18:1.

[38] Luke 3:21.

[39] Luke 6:12-13.

[40] Luke 5:15.

The fact that Jesus deliberately set aside huge chunks of quality time during which he spent in communion with his heavenly Father, indicates that his relationship with heaven was much more than a casual or superficial encounter. It was a relationship erected on love. Samuel Taylor Coleridge declared: "He prayeth well, who loveth well."[41]

It is a fact of life that when we love someone, we do everything possible to find quality time to be with them, in order that we might get to know them better. We cannot love something or someone that we are ignorant about. In truth, the personal knowledge of Christ is the foundation on which the Church is grounded (1 John 1:1-4).[42] The Christian life demands genuine time of courtship with our Heavenly Father, in order that we might deepen our relationship with Him and prayer is the medium by which this is accomplished. Additionally, we cannot introduce others to a personality that we don't know. As such, the measure of our holiness and effectiveness to minister to others is directly proportional to the degree by which God becomes real in our lives.

Throughout the decades there have been repeated attempts to affix labels to prayer, in an effort to describe what it really is. Thomas H. Green, a Jesuit scholar, describes prayer as, "the *opening* of the mind and heart to God.[43] He argues that, prayer is an encounter with God that is essentially dialogical affording both parties the opportunity to participate in dialogue. Since God speaks to us in prayer, it is essential that we

---

[41] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Rhyme of The Ancient Mariner," in Frank Kermode and John Hollander, eds, *The Anthology of English Literature, vol 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 204.*

[42] 1 John 1:1-4.

[43] Thomas H. Green, *Opening To God: A Guide to Prayer* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1977), 36.

cultivate the capacity to listen and hear what He might be saying to us, because even God cannot effectively dialogue with someone who is interiorly deaf.

Since the Christian life is rooted in God: "For in Him we live and have our beings" (Acts 17:28),[44] successful living demands that we become acquainted with His perfect will for our lives. And it is through the practice of prayer that we receive revelation. Jesus taught his disciples to pray: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).[45] The apostle Paul also prayed unceasingly for the Colossian converts to "be filled with knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" so they would "lead lives worthy of the Lord, and fully pleasing him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:9-10).[46]

God's revelation to His children regarding His will for their lives is not a one shot deal. Spiritual life, like all life, is about growth and change. Our heavenly Father reveals His will to us gradually as we seek to become acquainted with His personality. Through the practice of prayer we gradually acquire spiritual enlightenment and become more attuned to what God is accomplishing on our behalf or what He is demanding of us. However, it is clear that spiritual revelation entails spending time with God in prayer, in order that He might impart His will to His children. In this vein, it is imperative that

---

[44] Acts 17:28.

[45] Matthew 6:10.

[46] Colossians 1:9-10.

Christians learn the art of prayer from the Master Teacher, in like manner as the disciples petitioned Jesus: "Lord teach us to pray…" (Luke 11:1b).[47]

In addition to developing a love relationship and ascertaining the will of our heavenly Father through the practice of prayer, there are other dimensions of the Christian existence in which prayer plays an important role. This fact is supported by numerous biblical references, including the occasion when Jesus separated Peter, James and John from the other disciples and took them up into the high elevations of a mountain where the three had the exclusive privilege of being witnesses to their Lord's transfiguration (Luke 9:28-29).[48]

A significant event ensued the following day after Jesus and the three elated disciples returned to base camp that served to throw the spotlight on the prayer deficiency evident in the lives of his disciples.

While Jesus and the three disciples were on the mountain, a distraught father brought his epileptic son to the disciples who remained behind, requesting that they heal his ailing child. The disciples attempted to fulfill the distraught father's request, but were unable to do so. When Jesus returned, the angst-ridden father presented his ailing son to him and reported that the disciples were ineffective in casting out the malignant spirit that laid claim to his son's being. (Luke 9:37-40).[49] After exorcising the demonic spirit from the boy, Jesus castigated his disciples for their lack of faith. Shortly after becoming the recipients of a tongue-lashing, the perplexed disciples privately approached their Lord,

---

[47] Luke 11:1b.

[48] Luke 9:28-29.

[49] Luke 9:37-40.

inquiring as to why they could not cast the demonic spirit out of the boy. Jesus responded telling them: "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer" (Mark 9:29).[50]

The revealing incident highlighting the disciples' inability to heal the epileptic, coupled with the harsh words of Jesus, sent home the undeniable fact that a spiritual force field exists in the universe which they could not penetrate on account of their ineffective prayer life. Jesus indicated to his followers that, in order to engage in spiritual warfare against demonic forces, they needed a life that was bathed in prayer and marinated with faith. His admonition served to put his disciples on notice that, prayer is much more than a ritualistic practice where vain repetitions are directed to God with the expectation that He would automatically honor requests. He made it unmistakably clear that prayer must be erected on faith.

We are on solid biblical ground by arguing that in addition to developing a love relationship with our heavenly Father whereby we discern His will for our lives, faith-laced prayer is indispensible in tearing down strongholds of the enemy. Paul reminds us that, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12)."[51] Paul's sends home the fact that, we need to be endued with supernatural power that will garner us victory while we are engaged in spiritual warfare and such power is availed to God's children through the medium of prayer.

---

[50] Mark 9:29.

[51] Ephesians 6:12.

In addition to the previously mentioned realities that prayer accomplishes in the lives of believers, it also affords God the opportunity to pull back the proverbial curtain and afford His children a glimpse into the supernatural realm. It is easy for us to become earth bound and forget that we are merely sojourners on the so-called blue planet. By so doing, we tend to become ecclesiastical ostriches and stick our heads in the sand, becoming oblivious to the fact that there is another dimension to our existence. This fact is supported by an Old Testament report:

> Once when the king of Syria was warring against Israel, he took counsel with his servants, saying, 'At such and such place shall be my camp.' But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, 'Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are going down there.' And the king of Israel sent to the place of which the man of God told him. Thus he used to warn him, so that he saved himself there more than once or twice.
>
> And the mind of the king of Syria was greatly troubled because of this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, 'Will you show me who of us is for the king of Israel?' And one of his servants said, 'None my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber. And he said, 'Go and seize him.' It was told him, 'Behold he is in Dothan.' So he sent horses and chariots and a great army; and they came by night, and surrounded the city.
>
> When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots were round about the city. And the servant said, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do? He said, Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' Then Elisha prayed, and said, 'O Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see.' So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and behold the mountains was full of horses and chariots on fire about Elisha. And when the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the Lord and said, 'Strike down this people, I pray thee, with blindness.' So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha. (2 Kings 6:8-18).[52]

---

[52] 2 Kings 6:8-18.

By the act of prayer, God endowed Elisha's servant with spiritual illumination that afforded him a peek behind the veil. He was able to recognize that there is a heavenly and unseen reality that is capable of being discerned when God's children pray for supernatural vision. This is congruent with the scenario in Acts when Stephen while being martyred declared: "I see the heaven open and the son of man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56).[53] This is a clear revelation from God that the heavens need not remain closed to His children, because He has the ability and is willing to reveal what lies behind the veil to those who prayerfully approach Him with "eyes of faith." James Emery White declared: "The very meaning of the word 'revelation' from the Latin *revelatio* , is to 'draw back the curtain,' to reveal to us that which would have remained hidden had God not chosen to engage in the act of revelation."[54]

While prayer is essentially opening ourselves to God, it must be borne in mind that prayer is not contingent on our efforts alone. Paul gives magnificent expression to the fact that the Holy Spirit works in us—not only to justify us, but also to teach us how to speak to God. He argues that we do not know how pray as we ought to, but the Spirit himself makes intercession with us with groaning which cannot be expressed. And he who searches the hearts knows what the Spirit means, for the Spirit intercedes for the saints as God himself wills (Romans 8:26-27)[55]

---

[53] Acts 7:56.

[54] James Emery White, *A Mind for God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 15.

[55] Romans 8:26-27.

The Bible teaches that, it is through the agency of the Holy Spirit that God reveals His will to us. (John 14:26).[56] The ability to discover God's will is known as discernment. It simply means that we develop the capacity to spiritually discern God's will for our lives. However, before we are able to accomplish this, the right climate or environment must exist, in order to facilitate an encounter. In other words, we must first purify our hearts in order that we might be receptive to Divine directives. In like manner that a broken radio receiver is unable to pick up transmission waves, God's Spirit is hindered from establishing contact with our spirit if our hearts are impure and unprepared to receive His directives. This truth is evidenced in the life of David who found himself on a slippery slope when his spirit was no longer attuned to God's will. David became engaged in an adulterous relationship with Bathseba who was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of his most powerful generals. After being notified by Bathsheba that she had been impregnated by David, Israel's commander-in-chief unleashed a sinister plot resulting in the murder of Uriah. God confronted David concerning sin and in order to reestablish a close relationship with his Creator, he petitioned: "Create in me a clean heart and put a new and right spirit within me" (Psalm 51: 10).[57] In like manner as David, we must ensure that there is nothing in our hearts that would prevent us from being receptive to God's will.

The goal of prayer is to transform our lives and to deepen and strengthen our love of God. God has given us the Holy Spirit as a helper to usher us into His presence. The concept of *perichoresis* informs us that all three entities of the Trinity work in unison to

---

[56] John 14:26.

[57] Psalm 51:10.

engender our spiritual development. The Bible states that we can only live the abundant life that God designed for us by walking in the Spirit (e.g., Matthew 12:28; Luke 2:40; 4:1-2, 14, 18-21; John 3:34; Acts 1:2).[58] This supernaturally assisted lifestyle was promised by God through the prophets (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:22-27)[59] and has been inaugurated in the life and death of Jesus (Luke 22:20).[60]

[58] Matthew 12:28; Luke 2:40; 4:1-2, 14, 18-21; John 3:34; Acts 1:2.

[59] Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:22-27.

[60] Luke 22:20.

APPENDIX F

Human Bodies as Instruments of Spirituality

Human Bodies as Instruments of Spirituality

Session #4

Writing in *Weavings*, John Mogabgab states that, the human body is the medium of relatedness given us by God. In our individual bodies we encounter God through the vast web of relationships that shape our identity. With the body we 'taste' and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 43:8) and discover 'how very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity' (Psalm 133:1). Through the body we experience that in Christ we belong to one another (Romans 12:5) and may even, by grace, make visible to others the death and the life of Jesus (Galatians 4:7-11).[61] The preceding statement is food for thought. As biblical truth, it goes a long way towards framing our understanding of how we ought to view our physical bodies as instruments of spirituality.

The apostle Paul writes: "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).[62] The Bible is clear that Christians are "carriers" of the Holy Spirit that resides with us. In the same way as Mary, referred to in religious literature as the *Theotokus*—carrier of God, "carried" the incarnated Word within her womb, Christians are afforded the very same opportunity to house the Holy Spirit within their physical beings. The Bible states that, Christians are temples of the Most High and a human body can be a location and means for honoring

---

[61] John S. Mogabgab, "Editors Introduction," *Weavings: A Journal of The Christian Spiritual Life* 17 (September/October 2007), 2.

[62] 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

God because He has already chosen to reside in it. Since God has chosen to reside within our bodies, the body for all practical purposes is an instrument of revelation.

Writing in his book entitled, *Wasting Time With God,* Klaus Issler points out that, it is through the human body that we are able to recognize the two coexisting realms of our world: a material and immaterial reality.[63] Pointing to the existence of two realms in his writing to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul wrote:

> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to things that are seen but to things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).[64]

In addition to Paul's reference pertaining to two realms of existence, The Bible indicates in other instances that human beings are "embodied souls." Genesis tells us: "God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7)[65] Yet again, the apostle James writes: For the body apart from the spirit is dead..." (James 2:26).[66] It is clear that, by making Christians aware of the two realms of existence, the human body serves as an instrument of revelation.

In addition to serving an instrument of revelation, the body can be utilized as an instrument of worship. Christians have the unique distinction of utilizing their bodies as instruments of worship to God. Writing in Romans, the apostle Paul declared: "I appeal

---

[63] Issler, *Wasting Time With God,* 94.

[64] 2 Corinthians 2:17-18.

[65] Genesis 2:7.

[66] James 2:26.

to you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).[67]

Commenting on the statement of Paul, Origen, the ancient church father states:

> Paul says that the sacrifice is living because it has eternal life in it, which is Christ. Elsewhere he says: *We always carry in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies ((2 Corinthians 4:10).* He calls it holy because the Holy Spirit dwells in it, as he says elsewhere: *Do you know that you are God's temple and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (2 Corinthians 3:16)*[68]

Congruent with the sentiments of Origen, Augustine writes:

> If the body, which is less than the soul and which the soul use as servant or as a tool, is a sacrifice when it is used well and rightly for the service of God, how much more is the soul when it offers itself to God? In this way, aflame in the fire of divine love and with the dross of worldly desire melted away, it is remolded into the unchangeable form of God and becomes beautiful in his sight by reason of the bounty of beauty which he has bestowed upon it[69]

It is clear from the sentiments of Origen and Augustine that God desires that we offer Him bodies that are free from the propensity to sin. In Old Testament times priests were required to offer lambs as sacrifices to God that were free from spot or blemish. Under the New Testament Church, animal sacrifices are no longer necessary. However, God requires that our bodies which are His temple, be free from sin. By being mindful of our bodies as temples of the God, we live with the thought of doing what God requires us

---

[67] Romans 12:1.

[68] Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture New Testament VI, *Romans* (Downers Grove, Il.: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 305

[69] Ibid., 306, 307.

to do. It allows us to let our bodies be what God desires them to be: a showcase from death and life of Jesus (2 Corinthians).[70]

Yet again, in addition to keeping our bodies free from sinful practices, we might also worship God through praise. This could be accomplished by studying God's word, praying, singing, dancing, making music on instruments and even in service. Service might entail preaching of God's word, teaching or even performing surgery. There are numerous ways by which we might employ our bodies as instruments of worship to God.

In addition to being a location for worshipping an honoring God, the body might also be recognized as an instrument of reconciliation. Writing in *Weavings*, Marilyn Chandler McEntyre states: "If we are 'members of one another' then we are bound together in sickness and health, and it behooves us to reflect on the terms of our common life accordingly"[71] Congruent with the sentiments of Marilyn Chandler McEntyre, Howard Thurman provides the Christian view as how members of the Body of Christ of different ethnicities might employ their bodies to reflect that they are members of one blood family

> If being Christian does not demand that all Christians love each other and thereby become deeply engaged in experiencing themselves as human beings, it would seem futile to expect that Christians as Christians would be concerned about the secular community in its gross practices of prejudice and discrimination. If a black Christian and a white Christian, in encounter, cannot reach out to each other in mutual realization because of that which they are experiencing in common, then there should be no surprise that the Christian institution has been powerless in the presence of the color bar in society. Rather it has reflected the presence of the color bar within its own institutional life.

---

[70] 2 Corinthians 4:10.

[71] Carolyn Chandler McEntyre, "This One Body," *Weavings: A Journal Of The Christian Spiritual Life 17* (September/October 2002) 5, 8.

> On the other hand, if Christians practice brotherhood among Christians, this would be one limited step in the direction of a new order among men. Think of what this would mean. Wherever one Christian met or dealt with another Christian, there would be a socially redemptive encounter. They would be like the Gulf Stream or the Japanese Current tempering and softening the climate in all directions. Indeed the Christian would be a leaven at all levels of community and in public and private living. Of course, such a situation may lend itself to all kinds of exploitation and betrayals—but the Christian would be one of the bulwarks of integrity in human relations in an immortal society[72]

The writings of McEntyre and Thurman concur that, Christians are afforded the unique opportunity of employing their bodies as instruments of reconciliation. By struggling to ensure that the horizontal aspect of the Cross becomes a reality in physical communion with each other, instead of fostering segregation, Christians will ensure that people of all ethnicities will live in brotherhood, as God intended it to be. In Genesis, God promised Jacob that a community of nations "will come from your body" (Genesis 35:11),[73] a promise that underscores the blood connections that binds us together as a human family.

Genesis informs us that God created Adam from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7).[74] It is quite evident that as human beings, we all share a kinship with the earth and all other plants and animals. As a matter of fact, God instructed Adam to have dominion over the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15).[75]

Dominion entails stewardship. As such, God intends that we recognize that we are stewards of life on our planet and that we should refrain from utilizing our persons in

---

[72] Howard Thurman, *Selected Writings* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006) , 110, 111.

[73] Genesis 35:11.

[74] Genesis 2:7.

[75] Genesis 2:15.

ways than pollute and destroy life on earth. The Psalmists and other poets down through history have made frequent allusions to the particularities of human, plant and animal life and how all are interconnected. In their own unique way, each has endorsed the holistic view of life on planet earth. With this though in mind, Christians must recognize that they have a sacred responsibility in maintaining stewardship over Mother earth and by so doing, refrain from employing themselves in ways that will diminish and ultimately exterminate life on the planet.

APPENDIX G

Commitment and Spirituality

Commitment and Spirituality

Session #5

Throughout the history of humankind, no worthwhile venture has been successful without a high level of commitment. It could be said that commitment is an indispensable catalyst in the equation of success.

Commitment is an essential ingredient for success both in the secular and spiritual arena. While commitment entails loyalty to a belief or cause, in matters of spirituality it also entails creating space in our lives for God, in order that we might be transformed by the Holy Spirit. We are afforded the opportunity of either maintaining a surface level relationship with God, or pursuing the deepest possible relationship that culminates in mystical union with our Creator. The ensuing result is entirely dependent of the level of commitment that is demonstrated by the individual believer. Since Jesus is the Christian's role model, it is important that we examine his life to discern the level of commitment he demonstrated, in order that he might cultivate the deepest possible relationship with his heavenly Father.

Before embarking on the brief three years of his public ministry, Jesus embarked on a forty-day fast in the wilderness, in order to prepare himself for waging spiritual warfare with Satan (Matthew 4:1-2; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-2).[76] The busy and chaotic times of public ministry and times of solitude where he experienced spiritual renewal is reflected in the following passages.

> That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered together about the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons……very early in the

[76] Matthew 4:1-2; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-2.

> But so much the more the report went abroad concerning him; and great multitudes gathered to hear and to be healed of their infirmities.
> But he withdrew to the wilderness and prayed (Luke 5:15-16).[77]

Before settling on the twelve disciples that would comprise his inner circle, Jesus consulted with his heavenly Father: "In these days he went out into the hills to pray; and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles…" (Luke 6:12-13).[78]

The biblical evidence reveals that Jesus realized the need to frequently break away from his demanding schedules that constantly sapped his energies both spiritually and physically, in order to be fortified in the inner life. Since our Lord provided us with an example we need to ensure that we set aside quality time in our busy schedules to spend with our heavenly Father, in order that we might be renewed and fortified in our spirit.

While we might entertain noble intentions as it pertains to spending quality time with God, in order that we might cultivate the deepest possible relationship with Him, we need to be honest with ourselves and admit that we are confronted with serious challenges that threaten to derail our spiritual development. In the first instance, we sometimes become captured by the misconception that God is hiding Himself from us. It is not uncommon under certain circumstances to question: "God where are you?"

---

[77] Luke 5:15-16.

[78] Luke 6:12-13.

Klaus Issler writes:

> God does not force his full presence on us; rather he partially hides himself to encourage a genuine response of friendship. It is as if God walks a precarious tightrope of giving enough clues about himself so that we would know he desires a deeper relationship, but not enough to overwhelm us or to coerce us towards him. God maintains a delicate tension between self-revelation and being hidden in order to assure that believers respond to his initiatives and pursue a relationship willingly.[79]

Since God's invisibility frequently poses a problem for many Christians, it is easy to become distracted from pursuing Him. Issler cautions that we must never misinterpret His intentions, because the relational distance He offers is not an indication of indifference towards us. The author claims that, "For an eternity, God has been dreaming about cultivating a special relationship with us. He has been willing to pay a great price to make this kind of relationship possible. Yet such a mutual love relationship with a majestic God requires a measure of distance in which God woos us to himself"[80] Armed with the reassurance that God will never leave or forsake us, even in those instances when He might appear to be absent from our lives, Christians must realize that our commitment to God entails pursuing Him even when He appears to be absent from our lives. James exhorts: "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you."[81]

Our commitment to seeking God on a regular basis, even in those instances when He might appear to be far away, is the litmus test of our love for Him. Responding to which is the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus declared: "You shall love the Lord

---

[79] Issler, *Wasting Time With God,* 128.

[80] Ibid.

[81] James 4:8.

your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."[82] In examining impediments that might be hindering our commitment to seeking a deepened relationship with our heavenly Father, it might be helpful if we truly love Him with all our heart, soul and mind. Jesus reminds us: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.[83] It might be beneficial to our spiritual development, if we engage in frequent self-appraisals of things or individuals that we assign the highest priority in our lives. In other words, what is our number one "treasure." Employing the idiom of the Old Testament, it might be beneficial for us to periodically examine our lives, in order to ascertain those "idols" that might be preventing us from cultivating the deepest commitment to God.

One of the ancient church fathers commented that business is the devil. Whether or not we care to embrace this sentiment, we might admit that in our postmodern world busyness is the bane of the believer. We are overwhelmed by the pressing demands of jobs, commitment to family, household chores, school, church activities, television, secular activities, entertainment, the list goes on. Many of us oftentimes voice the sentiment that we wish that we were afforded additional hours in the day that would permit us to make room in our lives for God. On the other hand, if we were afforded additional hours in any given day, it is still questionable whether or not we would spend the extra time with God or simply crowding our lives with lesser important activities.

Business activities have the tendency to desensitize us to the needs of our inner life and communion with our heavenly Father. Klaus Issler contends that because we

---

[82] Matthew 22:37.

[83] Luke 12:34.

choke God out of our lives with our busy schedule, every now and then "God may give us a wake-up call—a lingering illness, an accident, maybe terminal cancer, or even a loved one's sudden death—to get us off the merry-go-round of life and reconsider what our life is all about."[84] The author contends that we should be more heedful to crowding God out of our lives and not wait for such tragedies to clarify our priorities.[85]

Issler believes that it might be beneficial for Christians to reflect on God's appointed cycles in nature, in order to gain insights concerning the rhythms of life. He argues that, by taking cues from God's "natural" appointments with the cycles of the earth's rotation which produces, day and night, the monthly cycles of the moon and the seasons of spring, summer and fall, we might come to the awareness that these seasons are not nature-bound, but were established by God. He begs the question as to whether or not the natural regularities were created by God to inform us of understanding eternal truths. One such truth being that the physical body has been expressly designed by God to require regular periods of rest and renewal, with one third of life devoted to sleep. Issler further questions that if our bodies need rest and renewal, what of our souls?[86]

Pertaining to the principle of renewal Issler contends:

> We engage in certain activities, or cease to engage in certain activities, to bring renewal to our inner life, our mind and heart and to make a place for communing with God. He argues that need to take a break *from* routines *for* times of communion with God, for being with others, for times of deep fellowship as well as group

---

[84] Issler, *Wasting Time With God,* 132.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid., 133.

> recreation and play; for times of learning and for times of the aesthetic appreciation of the beauty, art and music of life from God.[87]

The author argues that instruction concerning rest and renewal primarily comes from the various Old Testament feasts and festivals of ancient Israel, as recorded mainly in Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28-29 and that the rest and renewal theme is merely one component among others that contribute to balanced Christian living with God. He contends that the main purpose of life is "growing into and obedient and deep relationship with God.[88]

Issler continues that, the main idea underlying the theme of renewing s related to the biblical words *rest* and *Sabbath.* Writing in the New Interpreter's Bible, Terence E. Fretheim states: "The divine act of blessing the Sabbath is an unspoken report of God's act of giving power and potentiality to a particular temporal order, in the sense that human honoring of the work-rest rhythm has the capacity of deeply affecting life itself (as does its neglect).[89]

Issler concludes that the primary emphasis in renewal is that of setting apart special times from the routine of our everyday lives to focus our relationship with God. He contends that it is through this activity that we receive rest for our souls. He opines that, in the very same way that we renew our physical bodies, we must give time to the renewal of our souls, by engaging in any and all activities that contribute to the renewing of the inner person. This involves meditating on God's word (Psalm 1;1-3), which

---

[87] Ibid., 134.

[88] Ibid., 135.

[89] Terence E. fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1:347.

facilitates the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:2). He states we must break from the routines and work schedules of life, in order to attend to the sustenance of our walk with God and the care and nurturing of our own souls. He further states that at a more general level, the whole life with God can be characterized as entering "God's rest" (Hebrews 4:10). He firmly believes that our business and workaholism will only destroy our inner life and our walk with God if we do not become intentional about making time for renewal and rest.[90]

In spite of our dizzying schedules, there are practical steps that we could take in order to create space in our lives for God, or what Klaus Issler refers to as "wasting time with God." While they might not be exhaustive of all the things we could do, we could participate in retreats away from home. While driving we might turn off the radio and engage in periods of quiet reflection. While showering or taking a bath, we might remember to connect with God. And while lying in bed before falling off to sleep we might engage in communion with God."[91]

The researcher worked for several years in New York City and discovered that several churches in New York metropolitan area and other large cities in the United States of America, avail their sanctuaries on a daily basis to the general public, affording individuals the opportunity to utilize the sacred canopies for periods of quiet reflection.

About a month or so after September 11, 2000, the event of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City, the researcher worked for an organization providing benefits to beneficiaries and victims of the terrorist attack. During the two years that I worked for the organization, I spent the vast majority of my lunch breaks

---

[90] Issler, *Wasting Time With God,* 139.

[91] Ibid., 141.

engaged in prayer and meditation in the sanctuary of a Roman Catholic church located a few blocks from my workplace. The time spent in solitude afforded me renewal and rejuvenation and provided me with a bulwark in my stress-filled vocation. Reflecting on the two years in which I "wasted time with God," I recognized that I experienced significant spiritual growth.

In addition to churches, many seminaries provide meditation gardens and reading rooms where people might isolate themselves for quiet reflection and contemplation. Individuals might even find quiet places in local parks where they could be alone. The essence of retreat is to find someplace where one is not distracted from sorting themselves out in the presence of God. The opportunities are endless in finding such places when we are committed to reaching the highest place in God.

Jesus exhorts: "Come unto me all ye that labor and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).[92] In our postmodern world with all of the frenetic activities that conspire to enmesh us in their debilitating routines, we are sorely in need of rest. This rest is found in emulating the Life of our Lord who lived life to its fullest, because he received renewal and rejuvenation from the Source of life itself, God the Father. And so should we!

---

[92] Matthew 11:28.

APPENDIX H

Faith and Spirituality

Faith and Spirituality

Session #6

"And without faith it is *impossible* to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).[94]

The Bible makes it unmistakably clear that God is Spirit (John 4:24),[95] essentially immaterial, non spatial, invisible, and the foundation upon which a relationship is erected with Him, is one of faith. Even though He is invisible, through the exercise of Faith, God becomes more real than any material object and that He is ever present. Writing in his book entitled, *The Divine Conspiracy,* Dallas Willard states: "Believers will need to acquire the world-view Jesus held during his life on this earth that ours is a God-bathed and God-permeated world."[96]

Writing in his book entitled, *Wasting Time With God,* Klaus Issler contends that Christians like everyone else has to do battle with the prevailing worldview of naturalism—that only objects that are accessible to the five senses actually exist. This prevailing mindset in the estimate of Issler deletes God by definition. Consequently, when Christians are overtaken by such a narrow, naturalistic mindset—that existence requires physicality—it becomes very difficult to pursue further a closer relationship with God who is invisible. Thus, to expand our horizons of reality, our core beliefs must essentially be strengthened by the Christian notion that existence does not necessarily require material substance.[97]

---

[94] Hebrews 11:6.

[95] John 4:24.

[96] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco, CA.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 61.

[97] Issler, *Wasting Time With God,* 93.

While the Book of Hebrews does indicate that, without faith it is impossible to please God, it also indicates that Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.[98] In this vein, we need to take our cues from him to discern how he grew in faith, in order that we might likewise grow in faith. Writing in *Word Biblical Commentary,* William Lane states:

> The poignant description as a whole points to Jesus as the perfect embodiment of faith, who exercised faith heroically. By bringing faith to complete expression, he enabled others to follow his example. The phrase reiterates and makes explicit what was affirmed with a quotation from Scripture in [Hebrews] 2:13, that Jesus in his earthly life was the perfect exemplar of trust in God.[99]

In the Book of Galatians, the apostle Paul expressed that his life as a believer was modeled after that of his Lord. He recognized that in his childhood (Luke 2:40) and youth (Luke 2:50), Jesus needed to grow in faith because he learned and grew wisdom and knowledge like all humans do. Since it was evident that Jesus was fully human, Paul recognized that it was necessary for him to follow the developmental blueprint established by his Lord. As such, he declared: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).[100]

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated grave concern over the littleness of the faith of others. Discerning their preoccupation with everyday survival, he declared:"But if God clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is

---

[98] Hebrews 12:2.

[99] William H. Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1991), 412.

[100] Galatians 2:20.

thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothes you? O men of little faith?" (Matthew 6:30).[101]

On one occasion when Jesus and his disciples were travelling in a boat, a storm arose during the trip and the disciples became terrified. Fearful of losing their lives, they cried out: "Save, Lord; we are perishing." And he said, "Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?" (Matthew 8:26).[102]

On yet another occasion, when Jesus' disciples demonstrated their inability to cast an evil spirit out of a young boy whose father had presented him to the disciples in order that they might heal him, Jesus had to intervene and heal the young boy after the father informed him that his disciples were unable to exorcise the evil spirit from his son. Jesus however chastised his disciples saying: O faithless generation, how long am I going to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?...(Mark 8:19).[103]

It is unmistakably clear from the biblical evidence provided that Jesus was an insider when it came to matters of faith. His was a living faith and not merely a vicarious experience. He knew what the life of faith was all about and the same holds true for those who are intent on being followers of the great Galilean.

In his book entitled, *Wasting Time With God,* Klaus Issler informs us that growing in faith on the part of Christians, involves becoming convinced of three pairs of contrasting features of God's plan. The first is that Christians must recognize that our world consists of two coexisting realms: a material and an immaterial reality. Secondly, two kingdoms

---

[101] Matthew 6:20.

[102] Matthew 8:26.

[103] Mark 8:19.

compete for our allegiance: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Thirdly, two sequential phases exist in the believer's journey: the "already" (life on this planet) and the "not yet" (life beyond the grave).[104]

The Bible tells us that, Christians live in two kinds of reality—one visible and one that is invisible. In his writings, the apostle Paul makes reference to this reality:

> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to things that are seen but to things that are unseen; for things that are seen are transient, but things that are unseen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

While the Bible makes it crystal clear that we exist in two realms, our belief system faces severe challenges from various sources that deny the existence of God and one of the main sources that refute the existence of the existence of God is the world of academia.

Commenting in his book entitled, *The Soul of the American University* on the limitations imposed by the antisupernatural bias existing in the university classrooms of America, Duke historian George Marsden writes: "One way to describe the current state of affairs, however, is that, in effect, the only points of view that are allowed full academic credence are those that presuppose purely naturalistic worldviews."[105]

Writing in the Foreword of J.P. Moreland's book entitled, *The Creation Hypothesis,* Philip Johnson states:

> It is practically impossible to discuss this important question [Are we created beings....or are we accidental products?] in any of our great secular universities, let alone the public high schools. The reason is that the modernist culture is ruled by a philosophy called *scientific*

---

[104] Issler, *Wasting Time With God, 94.*

[105] George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 430.

> *naturalism* ...Naturalism is the doctrine that the cosmos has always been a closed system of natural causes and effects that can never be influenced by anything from the "outside"—like God. It follows from such philosophical premises that "God" is an aspect of human subjectivity or a fantasy…God is merely an entity in the minds of those who believe.[106]

In addition to being confronted with the issue of scientific naturalism by the pundits in academia, which conspires to blunt our awareness to the existence of a visible and an invisible realm, Christians in American society are forced to contend with the issue of "separation of church and state," which frowns on the discourse of God in the public arena. In view of the fact that mass media plays a powerful informational role in American society and that any serious thinking about God is virtually absent, it tends to reinforce the naturalistic mindset, thereby further challenging the Christian viewpoint pertaining to two existing realms of reality.

Despite the opposition concerning two existing realms of reality espoused by both academia and the mass media, the Bible provides concrete examples that these two realms do exist. As it pertains to our physical bodies, God created us with the physical body and an immaterial soul and spirit, capable of relating to these two realms. James states that "the body without the spirit is dead" (James 2:26)"[107] This lends credence to the biblical truth that the human being is an embodied soul, where our material form enables us to interact with our physical surroundings and our immaterial aspect enable us to interact with God.

Revealing that a supernatural or invisible reality exists apart from the physical realm, the Bible informs us that just before the first Christian martyr, Stephen, made his initiation

---

[106] Phillip Johnson, "Foreword," in Moreland, *The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer* (Downers Grove, Il: Intervarsity Press, 1994).

[107] James 2:26.

into eternity; God drew back the curtain and afforded him a glimpse of heaven. Before his murderers hurled the first volley of their killing stones, he declared: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56).[108]

The overwhelming evidence from the Bible regarding two realms of reality, is proof positive that the heavens need not remain closed for those who are believers, because the supernatural realm will swing wide its doors when we assume the attitude of our Lord and be prepared to visualize this reality with "eyes of faith."

The second issue that Christians are compelled to deal with concerning the growth of faith is the fact that two contrasting kingdoms compete for our allegiance as demonstrated by Jesus during his earthly ministry.

The Pharisees visualized Jesus as a threat to their power and seeking to discredit him, claimed that his ability to drive demons out of those who were possessed was possible only because he was in league with Satan. Jesus responded to their allegations stating: "Every Kingdom divided against itself is laid waste and no city or house divided against itself will stand; and if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12: 26-28).[109]

In the foregoing passage, Jesus made it crystal clear that two kingdoms exist in our universe and there is ample biblical evidence that the two kingdoms compete for our allegiance. Scripture exhorts us: "Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls

---

[108] Acts 7:56.

[109] Matthew 12:26-28.

around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (James 5: 8).[110] The apostle's exhortation puts us on notice that the enemy of our soul is always conspiring to entice us into engaging in practices that are out of the synch with the will of God for our lives. However, by "putting on the armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11),[111] we are able to victoriously engage him in spiritual warfare.

As it pertains to the kingdom of God competing for our obedience, the Bible teaches that this physical world is merely a conduit to heaven, thus the apostle James's exhortation that we be sober, in order to inherit our divine birthright as sons and daughters of God. In keeping our behavior congruent with this reality, Christians are "looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (1 Peter 3:13). The Bible informs us that, nothing impure will enter that kingdom, nor will anyone whose name is not written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21: 4, 27).[112]

The third aspect that Christians must grapple with concerning the growth of faith, is the "already" and a "not yet" aspect of God's kingdom project. The apostle Paul wrote: "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3: 2-4).[113] As it pertains to those who live with the expectation of heaven, Peter O' Brien writes:

> For a moment their heavenly life remains hidden, secure with Christ in God. Their new life as Christians in Christ is not visible to others and, in some measure, is hidden from themselves. It will only

---

[110] James 5:8.

[111] Ephesians 6:11.

[112] Revelation 21: 4, 7.

[113] Colossians 3: 2-4.

> be fully manifest when Christ, who embodies that life, appears at his Parousia. Indeed, the day of the revelation of the Son of God will be the day of the revelation of the sons of God. That manifestation will take place 'in glory' for it will involve the sharing of Christ's likeness and the receiving of the glorious resurrection body.[114]

Christians are experiencing the "already" phase of God's two-phase program. This fact is congruent with the teachings of the apostle Paul who declared: "But we who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:23).[115] After the "already" phase, born-again believers will be ushered into the "not yet" phase of eternity, either through death or the second coming of our Lord (Matthew 25; 34).[116]

Living the life of faith that God intends for His Children entails the ability to struggle with every nerve and sinew to know Him at the deepest possible level through the kind of faith that refuses to adhere to the tenets of the naturalistic mindset, but instead subscribes to the word of God: "Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind… (Romans 12: 2).[117]

Klaus Issler opines that, the growth of faith is contingent upon our core beliefs or convictions. As such, Christians need to constantly be in the process of affirming certain core beliefs and ref-forming others regarding what is really true about God and His world.

---

[114] Peter T. Obrien, *Colossians, Philemon,* World Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 171.

[115] Romans 8:23.

[116] Matthew 25: 34.

[117] Romans 12: 2.

Writing in his book entitled *The Divine Conspiracy,* Dallas Willard indicates that contrary to popular opinion certain ideas and convictions that we hold dear significantly affect our lives. The insightful author states:

> But in our culture there is a severe illusion about faith, or belief. It is one that has been produced by many centuries of people professing, as a cultural identification, to believe things they do not really believe at all… thus there arises the misunderstanding that human life is not really governed by belief. This is a disastrous error. We often speak of people not living their faith. But the cases in which we say this are not really cases of people behaving otherwise than they believe. There are cases in which genuine beliefs are made obvious by what people do. We always live up to our beliefs —or down to them, as the case may be. Nothing else is possible.[118]

Since beliefs are acquired passively over time and is formed by the evidence about reality confronted in life, Klaus Issler is of the opinion that they cannot be changed in an instant of time just by wanting to believe differently.[119] However, since the formation of beliefs involves being convinced about truth over a period of time, beliefs that are out of synch with God's truth could be changed by studying God's word under the direction of the Holy Spirit. (John 14:26)"[120] Since it is evident that the study of God's word is not a pure cognitive endeavor, it is therefore imperative that our minds are continually being renewed (Romans 12: 2).[121]

Living the life of faith as God intends for us and being cognizant of the three spheres of existence outlined in this lecture on faith entails drawing near to God with the understanding that what we touch, see and feel is not the sum total of reality. Only God is!

---

[118] Willard, Divine *Conspiracy, 114.*

[119] Issler, *Wasting Time With God,* 114.

[120] John 14:26.

[121] Romans 12:2.

We must seek to cultivate the deepest possible relationship with God that permits us to experience the invisible realm with "eyes of faith." This reality is congruent with the words of the apostle Peter: "Without having seen him you love him; though you do not see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy" (1 Peter 1:8-9).[122] In an effort to know God better, believers must be convinced that though invisible, He is real and that He is as close as the air we breathe. They must be aware that there are of the two realms in which we exist, the two kingdoms competing for our allegiance and the "already" and the "not yet" phases of God's kingdom. But more important of all, Christians must be aware of the truth that God desires our faith be strengthened as we earnestly seek Him. Writing in his book entitled, *Christian Behavior,* C.S. Lewis declares: "God's children must learn how to live and navigate in an immaterial realm by aligning their wills with God's within his kingdom."[123] It could be said that aligning our wills with that of God entails the exercise of faith, because faith is not only contingent on eyesight, but also insight.

---

[122] 1 Peter 1:8-9.

[123] C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behavior* (New York: Macmillian, 1945), 55.

Appendix I

Confidentiality Release

LIGHTING THE WAY: PROMOTING A HEIGHTENED STATE OF SPIRITUAL AWARENESS IN BEREAN MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

The confidentiality statement that is being signed has to do with the model that will be developed subsequent to the study and will be used as a final document leading to the researcher's Doctor of Ministry Degree from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.

Please be advised that everything discussed in study sessions are to be held in strict confidentiality. Should you need clarification on certain issues, please feel free to consult with your study associates or contact me immediately.

You are fee to opt out of the study at any time, if you so desire. However, I hope that you do remain for the entire duration, since this venture is important as it pertains to our church and me personally. I am aware of the constraints on everyone's time. However, I can assure you that the dividends that will eventually accrue will be beneficial to the entire Berean church family.

_____ _____

Signature Date

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, Diogenes. Spiritual Theology: The theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1997.

Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture New Testament, Romans. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998.

Bonheoffer, Dietrich. The Cost of Discipleship. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1959.

Bright, John. A History of Israel. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

Chambers, Oswald. My Utmost For His Highest. Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1935.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "The Rhyme of The Ancient Mariner," in Frank Kermode and John

Hollander, eds, The Anthology of English Literature, vol 2. New York, Oxford University Press, 1975.

Cooper, Tracy and Dixon, Carol F. Berean Missionary Baptist Church: Remembering Our Past, Redeeming Our Future. Port Washington, NY: Commemorative Publications, 2001.

Creswell, John w. Research Design Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994.

Dyer, Wayne. Manifest Your Destiny: The Nine Spiritual Principles for Getting Everything You Want. New York: Harper Collins, 1997.

Foster, Richard J. Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978.

Foster, Richard J. Prayer: Finding The Heart's True Home. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992. 261

Fretheim, Terence E. "The Book of Genesis," in the New Interpreter's Bible. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994.

Graybeal, Lynda & Roller, Julia L. Connecting With God: A Spiritual Formation Guide. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2006.

Green, Thomas H. Opening To God: A Guide to Prayer. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1977.

Greenwood, Davydd J. Introduction to Action Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005.

Grunden, Larry. A Manual For Spiritual Coaching. Miamiasburg, OH, 1998.

Harvey, Van A. A Handbook of Theological Terms. New York: The Macmillian Company, 1964.

Issler, Klaus. Wasting Time With God: A Christian Spirituality of Friendship With God. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001.

James, Larry. Life Skills. Traverse City, MI: Sage Creek Press, 1998.

Johnson, Philip. "Foreword," The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. Strength To Love. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1963.

Lane, William H. Hebrews 9-13, World Bible Commentary. Waco, TX: Word, 1991.

Lewis, C.S. Christian Behavior. New York: McMillan, 1945.

Lewis, C.S. The Complete C.S. Lewis. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2002. 262

Lewis, C.S. The Problem of Pain. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001.

Marsden, George. The Soul of the American University. New York: Oxford Press, 1994.

McEntyre, Carolyn Chandler. This One Body. Nashville, TN: Weavings, Vol XXII, Number 5, 6, 2008.

McFague, Sally. Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987.

Merton, Thomas. A Year With Thomas Merton: Daily Meditations From His Journals. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1989.

Merton, Thomas. Bread In The Wilderness. New York: New Directions Books, 1953.

Merton, Thomas. Inner Experience. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2003.

Merton, Thomas. The Ascent to Truth. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1951.

Merton, Thomas. The Seven Storied Mountain. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1948.

Merton, Thomas. What Is Contemplation? Springfield, IL: Templegate, 1950.

Mogabgab, John S. "Editor's Introduction": Weavings 17 (September/October 2002), 2.

Moreland, J.P. Love Your God With All Your Mind. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997.

Nouwen, Henri. Making All Things New: An Invitation to he Christian Spiritual Life. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.

Nouwen, Henri. Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith. New York: Harper Collins, 2006. 263

Nouwen, Henri. Turn My Mourning Into Dancing. Nashville, TN: Publishing Group, 2001.

Obrien, Peter T. Colossians, Philemon, World Biblical Commentary. Waco, TX: Word, 1982.

Osmer, Richard. A Teachable Spirit. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1950.

Salter McNeil, Brenda. A Credible Witness: Reflections on Power, Evangelism and Race. Downers Grove, IL; Intervarsity Press, 2008.

Shakell, Peter. Is Your Lord Large Enough? Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2008.

The National Baptist Hymnal. Nashville,TN: Triad Publications, 1977.

The United Methodist Hymnal. Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989.

Tielhard de Chardin, Pierre. Divine Milieu. New York: Harper Row, 1960.

Schakell, Peter J. Is Your Lord Large Enough? Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2008.

Thurman, Howard. A Strange Freedom. Boston, MA.: Beacon Press, 1998.

Thurman, Howard. Essential Writings. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006.

Thurman, Howard. Jesus and the Disinherited. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Thurman, Howard. Meditations of The Heart. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1953.

Tillich, Paul. The New Being. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955. 264

Tillich, Paul. The Shaking of The Foundations. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948.

Toon, Peter. The Art Of Meditating on Scripture. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 1993.

Washington, James Melvin. Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.

Wesley, John. "The Scripture Way of Salvation," cited in John Wesley, edited by Albert C. Outler. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.

West Cornell. Race Matters. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

White, James Emery. A Mind For God. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006.

Willard, Dallas. The Divine Conspiracy. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998.

Zondervan Expository Dictionary of Bible Words. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991.

Community Board 8, Brooklyn. http://www.brooklyn8.org/needs2007.htm (accessed August 2007).